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AUTHOR Howley-Rowe, Caitlin

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ABSTRACT

As part of its contract to develop a framework for continuous school improvement in its four-state region (Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia), Appalachia Educational Laboratory staff designed the Quest project. Based upon principles of inquiry, collaboration, and action research, Quest supports and investigates ongoing school improvement efforts through rallies, summer symposia, a Scholars program, visits to participating schools, communication via listserv and mailings, and the creation of a Quest network of schools. This report describes and assesses the first Scholars colloquium, held July 16-18, 1998, in Charleston, West Virginia. Eleven Quest members participated, including teachers, administrators, and others from elementary, middle, and high schools. Evaluation data were generated by evaluator and intern participant observation, unstructured interviews, daily feedback forms, and Scholar assessment of the Quest project as a whole. Many colloquium goals were met, especially those concerned with collaboration and connection among participants. Scholars and Quest staff began to plan network activities and products. Many indicated their interest in coauthoring articles and conference presentations with project staff. Project recommendations included ensuring that contributions of noneducators were not devalued, responding to Scholars' suggestions for improving Quest, confirming that participants understand the purposes and procedures for project activities, and using Scholars' conceptualizations of Quest to enhance project development. Appendices present the Quest framework for continuous improvement, daily feedback forms, the final evaluation form, and the evaluation standards checklist. Contains 22 references. (Author/TD)

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Evaluation of QUEST Scholars Colloquium, July 1998

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Caitlin Howley-Rowe

Appalachia Educational Laboratory, Inc.
P.O. Box 1348 • Charleston WV 25325 • 800-624-9120

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Evaluation of QUEST Scholars Colloquium, July 1998

by

Caitlin Howley-Rowe
Research Assistant

August 1998

QUEST Project
Appalachia Educational Laboratory
Post Office Box 1348
Charleston, West Virginia 25325

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AEL's mission is to link the knowledge from research with the wisdom from practice to improve teaching and learning. AEL serves as the Regional Educational Laboratory for Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia. For these same four states, it operates both a Regional Technology in Education Consortium and the Eisenhower Regional Consortium for Mathematics and Science Education. In addition, it serves as the Region IV Comprehensive Technical Assistance Center and operates the ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools.

Information about AEL projects, programs, and services is available by writing or calling AEL.

Appalachia Educational Laboratory
Post Office Box 1348
Charleston, West Virginia 25325-1348
304/347-0400
800/624-9120
304/347-0487 (Fax)
aelinfo@ael.org
http://www.ael.org

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As part of its contract to develop a framework for continuous school improvement in its four-state Region, Appalachia Educational Laboratory (AEL) staff designed the QUEST project. Based upon principles of inquiry, collaboration, and action research, QUEST proposes to support and investigate ongoing school improvement efforts through bi-annual conferences (which staff renamed rallies), summer symposia, a Scholars program, visits to participating schools, communication via listserv and mailings, and the creation of a QUEST network of schools. This evaluation report describes and assesses the first QUEST Scholars Colloquium, held July 16-18, 1998, in Charleston, West Virginia.

A total of 11 QUEST network members participated in the Scholars Colloquium. Six Scholars came from elementary schools: two were principals, three were teachers, and one was a speech therapist. One Scholar, from a small, rural K-12 school that had been broken into sub-parts, was the administrator of middle school grades. The four remaining Scholars hailed from high schools: one was a principal, one a teacher, one a student, and one a parent.

The Colloquium was evaluated in terms of whether its goals were met. To this end, a variety of data were gathered. Field notes were taken during evaluator and intern participant observation of all activities, participants completed three written feedback forms, and unstructured interviews were conducted throughout the Colloquium. In addition, data were collected concerning Scholar assessment of the QUEST project as a whole.

Analysis of the data suggested that many of the Colloquium goals had been met, especially those concerned with collaboration and connection among participants. Although the Scholars and QUEST staff did not design network activities and products, they did begin to plan them. Many indicated their interest in co-authoring articles and conference presentations with project staff. In addition, participants did engage in several activities and discussions regarding assessment of the project in general, offering many observations and several critiques.

Based upon these data, the evaluator concluded that the Colloquium had encouraged collaboration between QUEST staff and the Scholars in terms of planning for development of network products and evaluating the project. Recommendations included ensuring that the contributions of non-educators are not devalued by participants who are educators, responding to the suggestions Scholars offered for improving QUEST, validating that participants understand the purposes and procedures for project activities, and using Scholars' conceptualizations of QUEST to enhance project development.

INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 1996, QUEST staff at the Appalachia Educational Laboratory (AEL) began working with teams from school communities in three West Virginia county school districts to invigorate efforts for continuous school improvement, using a variety of techniques for gathering input from all those with a stake in their local schools (Howley-Rowe, 1998e). This first "learning community," known as Leadership to Unify School Improvement Efforts (LUSIE), was comprised of school teams including students, teachers, administrators, parents, and community members. Ultimately, this group wrote school visions and improvement plans and coauthored with AEL staff *Creating Energy for School Improvement* (1997), a supplemental guide for those poised to write their own state-mandated school improvement plans.

QUEST staff also planned to create learning communities devoted to exploring continuous school improvement across the four-state AEL Region. Hence, staff scheduled a pilot Inquiry Into Improvement conference in April 1997 for selected Region high schools. Schools were selected in several ways. Some schools were recommended for the QUEST experience by central office staff or school administrators. Other schools were asked to join QUEST because they had participated in previous AEL programs. Still other schools were invited because staff believed they were primed for the kind of collaborative inquiries into school improvement QUEST was designed to provide.

In October 1997, in Roanoke, Virginia, another conference was held for designated high schools in AEL's Region, this time with an explicit emphasis on forming and nurturing a network of high schools (Howley-Rowe, 1998c). The high school network met again in Pipestem State Park near Bluefield, West Virginia, on February 8-10, 1998 (Howley-Rowe, 1998d). The first conference for elementary schools was held in November 1997 in Nashville, Tennessee, intending to nurture a network for elementary schools (Howley-Rowe, 1998a). A second elementary "rally," as staff renamed the conferences, was convened on February 22-24, 1998, in Lexington, Kentucky (Howley-Rowe, 1998b).

At the February rallies, staff invited participants to apply for acceptance into the QUEST Scholars Program, the purpose of which was "to engage selected members of local school communities as co-learners with the QUEST staff in the design and assessment of Network activities and as co-investigators in research related to continuous improvement in schools." Participation was offered to members of both the high school and elementary networks. Goals for the Scholars Program were (1) to build a community of learners who seek to enhance their knowledge and skills in areas related to continuous school improvement, (2) to assess identified activities and projects carried out by the QUEST project, (3) to co-investigate selected questions related to continuous school improvement, (4) to provide leadership and support for continuous improvement efforts at local school sites, and (5) to coauthor publications and other appropriate products related to QUEST and continuous school improvement.

Projected activities included a Scholars Colloquium, during which Scholars would join QUEST staff in a four-day "learning experience," as staff called it, at AEL offices to focus on the program goals. Scholars were also asked to anticipate engaging in "periodic 'conversations' using the mail, telephone, and electronic media"; maintaining a QUEST journal in which they would respond to prompts provided by staff; and perhaps joining QUEST staff in visits to other network schools.

QUEST network members were asked to submit an application for acceptance into the Scholars Program. The application form posed four questions to potential Scholars: (1) In what ways have you (as an individual) been able to connect with the vision of QUEST?; (2) How can your school benefit from its involvement with QUEST?; (3) What perspectives, talents, skills, and/or relevant experiences would you bring to the QUEST Scholars Program?; and (4) What do you hope to derive from participation in the Scholars Program? Further, applicants were asked to sign a statement of intent to (1) participate actively in the summer Scholars Colloquium, (2) attend QUEST rallies and symposia, (3) respond to questions posted on the QUEST listserv (or received by mail), and (4) provide for continuous improvement in their own school communities. Space was provided at the bottom of the application form for principals to indicate their willingness to support school community members' involvement in the Scholars Program. The deadline for application was March 8, 1998.

The QUEST project offered Scholars reimbursement for travel and expenses associated with attending the Scholars Colloquium. In addition, Scholars would receive a $400 stipend following the Colloquium.

Staff limited participation in the Scholars Program to 12 network members. A total of 16 network members applied, four of whom were specifically invited to do so by QUEST staff. Eleven participants eventually attended the Colloquium as Scholars. The remaining five applicants withdrew application because they were unable to attend due to prior engagements. Six Scholars came from elementary schools: two were principals, three were teachers, and one was a speech therapist. One Scholar, from a small, rural K-12 school that had been broken into sub-parts, was the administrator of middle school grades. The four remaining Scholars hailed from high schools: one was a principal, one a teacher, one a student, and one a parent.

Scholars had committed to participating in four days of Colloquium activities. However, staff were unable to schedule a four-day event during the summer due to Scholars' previously-scheduled commitments. Thus, staff shortened the length of the Colloquium to three days and negotiated with the Scholars to meet for one day prior to the next rally, thereby ensuring four total days of Scholar activity.

The primary audience for this report is QUEST staff. It is intended to provide information for staff to draw upon as they make decisions about the project. Further, this report is one in a series that will document the evolution of the QUEST project. QUEST staff and others interested in

building networks or otherwise supporting continuous school improvement may find such documentation useful.

The purpose of this report is to assess whether, and to what extent, Colloquium goals were met. These goal were to (1) co-create network activities, (2) co-create QUEST products, (3) connect with the QUEST framework (see Appendix A) to a level of deep understanding, (4) collaborate with staff in research and assessment, (5) connect with other Scholars and with staff to create a community of learners and action researchers, (6) commit to year-long "creative collaboration," and (7) have fun. Because one major task Scholars were asked to undertake was assessment of the QUEST project based on their own experiences as participants, this report also captures their evaluative comments. Another aim of this report is to provide further documentation of the development of the QUEST project, and to begin building some theoretical formulations concerning the meaning of QUEST to network members.

METHODOLOGY

The methods used for this evaluation component of the QUEST project were qualitative. During the rally, the evaluator engaged in participant observation (Becker & Geer, 1957; Emerson, 1983; Glazer, 1972; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983; Miles & Huberman, 1994), a method highly suited "for studying processes, relationships among people and events, the organization of people and events, continuities over time, and patterns" (Jorgensen, 1989, p. 12). Furthermore, consistent with the QUEST paradigm, participant observation involves "a flexible, open-ended, opportunistic process and logic of inquiry through which what is studied constantly is subject to redefinition based on field experience and observation" (Jorgensen, 1989, p. 23). This method "is a commitment to adopt the perspective of those studied by sharing in their . . . . experiences" (Denzin, 1989, p. 156), thereby enabling researchers to evaluate how an event or process appears and feels to participants. And, finally, participant observation places the evaluator squarely in the field, rather than in the office or on the phone, allowing for the collection of richer, more directly acquired data (Patton, 1980).

In order to capture Colloquium activities more completely, the QUEST summer intern also acted as a participant observer, paying special attention to small-group activities and conversations to which the evaluator was not privy due to participation elsewhere.

Denzin (1989) describes four variations in participant observation strategies: the complete participant, the participant as observer, the observer as participant, and the complete observer (pp. 162-65). Both the evaluator and the summer intern played roles more akin to the participant as observer, participating in most Colloquium activities but not concealing data collection.

In order to corroborate the theses generated by participant observation, the evaluator also conducted other data collection and analysis activities. Using several data sources in order to corroborate theses is what Brewer and Hunter (1989) call "multimethod research" or "triangulation." This approach posits that the strengths of each method will compensate for the weaknesses in others, ultimately providing a more complete account of that being studied. Other data collection methods included the administration of feedback questionnaires and unstructured interviews. Participants were asked to respond to an evaluation form at the end of each day's activities (see Appendix B). These forms were identical for the first two days of the Colloquium; the final evaluation form asked questions concerning participant reaction to the entire Colloquium (see Appendix C). Unstructured interviews were conducted during the course of the Colloquium. As opportunities arose for relatively private conversation, participants were asked to discuss their assessments of the Colloquium, their new role as Scholars, and their thoughts on QUEST generally.

Additionally, QUEST listserv activity was monitored. Often, participants chose to communicate privately via E-mail with QUEST staff rather than with the entire network via the listserv; these communications were reported to the evaluator. Other data came from QUEST staff

following the Colloquium during "debriefing" activities; staff shared their assessments of the event and reported interactions with participants they found significant.

Data analysis was conducted in two ways. First, feedback from questionnaires was analyzed by question and by theme. Second, field notes were analyzed by theme, with special attention paid to the ways in which such data corroborated or contradicted written feedback from participants. Other data, such as that from unstructured interviews and staff communications, also were analyzed by theme.

In terms of beginning to build some theoretical formulations about the project, the evaluator relied on the "grounded theory" approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This perspective proposes that researchers ought to build theory based upon themes that emerge from data, rather than applying pre-existing theories to data in order to make meaning of it. In other words, this method "stresses discovery and theory development rather than logical deductive reasoning which relies on prior theoretical frameworks" (Charmaz, 1983, p. 110). After initial coding of recurring and significant themes in the data, the researcher refines codes further in order to develop conceptual categories. Relationships between themes are noted, as are instances when expected relationships do not occur. Sometimes more data need to be collected concerning particular themes in order to affirm or refine hypotheses; this has been called "theoretical sampling" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Ultimately, the grounded theory approach "progressively leads to more abstract analytic levels" (Charmaz, 1983, p. 125), having begun with inquiry into data rather than with an effort to verify prior theory.

This endeavor is fraught with sometimes unresolvable challenges. For instance, themes do not simply emerge from data; researchers are primed to see themes based on their own subjective experiences and theoretical commitments. Qualitative researchers are trained to be aware of such issues and to account for them by, for example, using multiple data collection methods, involving key informants in analytical work, and documenting personal as well as analytical reactions to data. In other words, qualitative study and grounded theory both require reflexivity.

However, the grounded theory approach has the advantage of enabling the researcher to use data as a means to formulate theory that is unique to the subject under investigation. In other words, the theory that is generated has a better aligned "fit" with the data. It is hoped that the theoretical formulations made in this report will thus have much relevance to QUEST staff as they continue to research continuous school improvement.

COLLOQUIUM ACTIVITIES

This section provides a detailed description of Colloquium activities and the discussions such activities generated. It is intended to provide QUEST staff with documentation of the event and of participant reactions to which they may not have been privy. Further, QUEST staff may find such an intensive description useful as they continue to research the ways in which continuous school improvement can best be supported.

Day One

The QUEST Scholars Colloquium began Thursday, July 16, 1998, at 8:30 a.m. in a conference room at AEL's offices in Charleston, West Virginia. The weather was very warm and sunny for the entire Colloquium; sunshine streamed in through the windows. The conference room in which Colloquium activities took place was an adjustable space, with movable walls between two halves of the room. QUEST staff opened the space, using one side for Colloquium activities and the other for sharing meals. Three round tables were set up in the area used for Colloquium work, with one long table against the front wall containing supplies, books, other reading materials, a cd player, and video tapes. Diagonal to the front of the room was a smaller table with facilitators' notes and supplies and an overhead projector. Easels with butcher paper were placed near each round table; on each table were colorful bags filled with toys and wicker baskets supplied with pens, markers, paper, tape, scissors, and Post-it notes.

On opposite walls were two very large pieces of illustrated butcher paper. The first had been created for an earlier rally, and depicted the QUEST project using a scene from nature as a metaphor. The second illustrated QUEST as a highway, with various roads representing the components of network activity and development, product development, and research and evaluation. Cars on the roads represented specific activities and products associated with each project component. Two easels displayed the seven Colloquium goals on butcher paper.

Scholars began to arrive at 8:15 a.m. Staff greeted each warmly, with a smile and some light conversation regarding travel. As more Scholars arrived, those who knew one another hugged and exchanged greetings. Staff provided each Scholar a canvas bag emblazoned with the QUEST logo. Each bag contained a journal, a directory of QUEST network members, a QUEST document prepared for the Tennessee Association of State School Administrators 1998 conference, and two QUEST evaluation reports.

By 8:26 a.m., three Scholars had not yet arrived. The two facilitators welcomed the group officially, and asked the project director to "say a word of welcome" and provide some context to the Scholars about AEL, Regional Educational Laboratory contracts, and the QUEST project. The three remaining Scholars arrived at 8:45 a.m., and were welcomed quickly as the project director continued speaking. The Scholars seemed attentive and relaxed. The project director said, in

closing, "We applaud you taking the risk of working with us in this way . . . . We feel you all are a special group of people . . . . This is a new opportunity to learn together, to be part of developing something new." A Scholar noted aloud that the project director's welcome had been "very eloquent for a short-term notice." The other participants laughed and clapped at this. The group appeared energetic and alert.

One of the facilitators then explained that the Scholars Program was "a new experience for us," in that participants were being asked to take an active role in the research being conducted by QUEST staff. She noted that it had been a challenge to create a Colloquium that provided both the structure of an organized event and the flexibility to be collaborative. Before she continued, however, she wanted to give participants some "orientation" regarding QUEST as a whole, and so turned to explaining the large poster depicting the project as a highway. The other facilitator joked, "We don't know where this highway is going!" In addition to illustrating QUEST, the poster also noted the various roles Scholars might assume, still using the highway as a metaphor. Scholars might be (1) Co-creators--What should these [QUEST products] look like?; (2) Mechanics--How can we fine tune these models?; and (3) Drivers--Where are we going? What are the best routes? Who should be on board? At the end of the road, QUEST will hopefully become a "scaled-up, useful, marketable program." The task of the Scholars is, in part, to collaborate with QUEST staff in determining how such a final product might look. One facilitator suggested, "We hope you will want to present [papers] and coauthor articles." The other added, "We want you to think about the shape of [QUEST] products. What would be a useful article for *you* to read?" The presenters then introduced their notion of Participative Assessment--"Assessing for yourself what has been valuable," "Assessing QUEST within yourself," or "Framing development for yourself"--and noted that Scholars would be asked to engage in such assessment during the Colloquium.

After discussing assessment a bit longer, the facilitators moved on to explain their seven goals for the Colloquium. This discussion opened with one of the facilitators joking--and relying on Scholars' knowledge of the other facilitator's book purchasing habits--"The latest book that has changed her life is *Mastering the Art of Creative Collaboration*." This drew a laugh. The facilitator used this as an entree to talk about the fourth goal, which focused on collaboration. "Creative collaboration," noted one facilitator, "is part of what continuous improvement is in schools."

The Colloquium goals were to (1) co-create network activities, (2) co-create QUEST products, (3) connect with the QUEST framework (see Appendix A) to a level of deep understanding, (4) collaborate with staff in research and assessment, (5) connect with other Scholars and with staff to create a community of learners and action researchers, (6) commit to year-long "creative collaboration," and (7) have fun. Participants appeared attentive to the explanation of the goals, laughing as one facilitator introduced a grumpy-looking, colorful doll named Maxine to illustrate the final Colloquium goal of having fun.

The facilitators noted that the Colloquium had no formal agenda, that each day's activities would begin at 8:30 a.m. and conclude at 4:00 p.m. They then asked participants to find the various materials in their canvas QUEST bags. The journal, they explained, contained prompts for Scholars

to use in the following activity. During this activity, participants were asked to find a partner, interview each other, and then prepare a depiction on poster paper of their partner. The facilitators offered some guidelines: "What would you include in a personal portfolio? What are your dreams? What have been some challenges? What would you include in a professional portfolio?" Once finished drawing, participants were to quickly introduce their partners and explain their depictions.

The room was filled with noise and conversation as Scholars interviewed each other, then quieted some as they began to draw on poster paper. At 10:07 a.m. the facilitators asked the participants to begin presenting their partners, taking only a minute or so each to explain their posters. This activity lasted until 10:46, and was quite energetic. The posters were colorful, partners shared stories about and praise of their partners, and most Scholars clapped as each presenter finished their presentation. As this activity ended, the facilitators announced a short break, during which Scholars snacked, stood up, chatted, and one even logged onto the Internet using one of the computers in the conference room. One administrator discussed with one QUEST staff member the ways in which she dealt with the weak leadership in her school: "I felt no empowerment for years, but I've learned to work around, or through, that." Another pair discussed traveling.

At 10:57 a.m., the facilitators called the group back to order, and one began to read excerpts from two books concerning creative collaboration. One passage, for instance, asked the reader to imagine "a community of commitment where questioning is more important than knowing and certainty" (Hargrove, 1998). The facilitator also discussed the notion of "great groups" (Bennis & Biederman, 1997), noting that "people don't want to be managed; they want to be led," especially those people who are "knowledge-workers." Quoting from Bennis, the facilitator described great groups as weaving "webs of voluntary, mutual responsibility." Seven Scholars took notes during this activity.

The facilitators then passed out copies of an excerpt from *Mastering the Art of Creative Collaboration* that described four elements of creative collaboration: (1) "Collaboration is extraordinary combinations of people," (2) "Collaboration is shared 'understood' goals," (3) "Collaboration is building new shared understandings that lead to something new," and (4) "Collaboration is an act of shared creation" (Hargrove 1998, pp. 4-5). Each element listed was followed by a descriptive paragraph. The facilitators asked participants to count off by four, and then convene in groups with other participants sharing their number in order to discuss the element of creative collaboration that corresponded with their number.

The evaluator participated in group number two, who discussed the notion that "collaboration is shared 'understood' goals." One participant noted that this idea was significant because individuals cannot make change without other people. The group then discussed how the centrality of shared goals to creative collaboration "parallels work in QUEST." One participant observed that QUEST "brings people together, who wouldn't otherwise have come together" from across a variety of experience and foci. "We don't usually get to work with researchers," she noted. "This gives us a chance to look at other data," contributed another Scholar. Continuing their discussion of QUEST, a Scholar described how much she had appreciated the co-venture, during which two QUEST staff

members visited her school; she said that she was anxious to receive their feedback from the visit. Returning to the subject of multiple perspectives, "AEL will compile stuff applicable across schools," noted a participant. Another added, "For us as practitioners to be able to validate what works is helpful" for the efficacy of any collaboration between QUEST staff and QUEST participants.

The conversation then turned to praise of QUEST as a whole: "[I've been in] all kinds of networks, but nothing quite like this," and "[I've] been doing this for 30 years and I haven't seen anything like this!" To which two other group members replied simultaneously "Me, too." One participant described QUEST as "an opportunity to step back," to consider school issues at a distance, an experience she called "renewing" and "rejuvenating." After such an experience, she said, she was able to "go back and say 'this is not so bad. We can build on this.'" Group members also said that "something happens immediately after the rallies." A group member reported that one student participant, for example, wrote a description of QUEST that she presented to the student council association at her school. Another member said that she had previously had "the common experience of [gaining] energy at a conference" only to have it "disappear" afterwards; "But with this, everyone was so energized and went right to work. I didn't have to tell them." In response, a participant conjectured that such energy was the result of collaboration. To which another said that collaboration thrived on "synergism," noting the value of "incorporating different styles [into the] creative process." "One of the things we're doing with this process is the creating," said a Scholar. "And the sharing," added another. A group member then began to describe her former professor's research on the "innate need to create." But then facilitators called time at 11:18, and the group member was unable to complete her description.

The summer intern participated in group number three during the discussion, focusing on the notion that "collaboration is building new shared understandings that lead to something new." This group considered the idea that "preset beliefs have to be surrendered in order to come together and understand, so problems can be solved," as one group member put it.

The facilitators asked participants to share important parts of their discussions with the whole group, requesting that one person from each group begin by reporting an insight. One group discussed the necessity of creating an open climate for the consideration of new ideas and for building trust and diversity in order to engage the community. "We're not looking for cookie bakers. We're looking for decision makers," said a group member, pointing out the need for meaningful community involvement. Another group shared their discussion concerning the ways in which collaboration brings people together who might not otherwise have met. A third group also noted this insight, adding their thoughts on the need to discard dogmatism. One group member added, "We all bring experience to QUEST. We're open to learning. That helps us attain new ideas." And the fourth group reported their hypothesis that "creativity occurs when two unlikes merge and create something new."

The facilitators then asked the Scholars if they had any individual insights they wanted to share. A student said that she felt a need to understand the pressures impinging on teachers in order

to understand teachers' behavior, particularly as they constrained teachers' creativity. She also noted her belief that alternative assessments were needed to adequately evaluate student learning. Another participant shared her sense that collaboration requires time and "a lot of bubbling in the pot," because there are "no magical, fast solutions or changes." Another participant replied, "And the 'a-ha' moment doesn't happen when you expect it." The group discussed the interplay between time and structure in the facilitation of collaboration, noting that results may not be apparent for quite some time. A facilitator suggested that the beginning point may be "declaring the impossible possible" (Hargrove 1998). A teacher noted that teachers overcome barriers to improvement "all the time in the classroom," by working with failing students who do not show considerable improvement until years later. Another participant suggested the usefulness of "hold[ing] the idea that there are other ways of thinking and doing" than those conventionally considered. A QUEST staff member described her "escape from higher ed," noting her realization that the ideas and work taking place "is ok for what's there, and there is some exciting stuff going on . . . . But it is a matter of trying to understand the world in which you find yourself."

Reflecting on disparate experiences, a principal said, "High school teachers seem less collaborative than elementary teachers." To which another Scholar replied, "That's because of the structure and departmentalization" in high schools. Another principal contributed her belief that collaboration in public schools is essential because public schools are on the "cusp of survival," losing students to private schools, home schooling, and an emerging public sense that the Internet will be able to provide adequate education. She continued by describing a solution: reinjecting spirituality into public education. She noted that the public must need such a reinjection because it is "why *Chicken Soup for the Soul* has sold so well." Then abruptly self-conscious, she exclaimed, "Why am I preaching? Enough! Stop!" Participants giggled. She continued, theorizing that people need and want spirituality as a part of their schooling. Without a strong education, she elaborated, "I see our country as in real peril," noting the increasing divisiveness between the haves and have-nots as an example. She concluded, "I see our work [in QUEST] as not only sharing and wonderful, but also as terribly critical." A facilitator rejoined that this was why community in school is so important, describing her visit to the principal's school two days before dismissal for the summer: "Teaching was still alive and vibrant." She noted that the bubbling fountain in the school entrance, the garden, and the development of a Monet pond at the school were all projects that "are getting at the spiritual side of community." A Scholar then added that she agreed that values and spirituality were necessary in an adequate education. Kids, she continued, naturally want to do what is right, and schools need to lead them in distinguishing right from wrong. An administrator added a story to illustrate the prior point. Eighth graders at her school had responded to a survey concerning the television show *South Park*, which is reported to contain rude language and conventionally repugnant content. She had thought that many of the eighth graders watched this show, but the survey revealed that 85% reported never watching it. These were the "most reassuring statistics in years," she reported.

A facilitator then described one of QUEST's challenges as finding alternative ways of assessing learning that can be communicated to the school communities. To which a principal replied by sharing her experiences mediating her school's push for change and innovation and her

school district's mandate to improve standardized test scores. She noted that she had known that without raising test scores she would be unable to institute all the innovative practices her school wanted, and so she "learned how to play the game." That year, based on research about children's brain development, her staff taught students test-taking skills, in part by simulating the stressful climate of test administration. As a result, student test scores increased, but the principal said, "I don't think they learned any more this year." "Our product was different than the product the district wanted," she noted, so her school provided the district with their desired outcome in order to create a climate in which their requests for support of innovation would more likely be granted. The principal further noted the disparity between her school's and the district's vision, describing the very prescriptive comprehensive school reform model the district favored and the much less prescriptive model for which her school hoped to attain funding.

At 11:50 a.m., the facilitators requested that the Scholars prepare to watch a video, *Leadership and the New Science*, based on the work of Margaret Wheatley. One facilitator briefly described the influence the "new science" (ie. chaos theory, complexity, quantum physics) had upon organizational theory. She noted the deep influence such theory had upon the development of QUEST, and said that the staff had wanted to share the video with Scholars in order to "spark out-of-the-box thinking," especially about whether the ideas presented in the video had "anything to say about my school, about our work in QUEST." The video began at 11:54 a.m. The major themes of the video were (1) order can emerge out of chaos, (2) information forms and informs us, (3) we don't know who we are until we are in relation to someone else, and (4) vision is an invisible field. These themes led to four major conclusions regarding organization life: (1) accept chaos, (2) share information, (3) develop a diversity of relationships, and (4) embrace a vision.

At 12:17, the video concluded, and the facilitators asked participants to spend some time writing in their journals about what meaning the ideas presented in the video might have for school improvement. The Scholars wrote quietly, until one of the facilitators asked participants to share some of their thoughts briefly. One principal noted that her school had experienced seven years of chaos; it had taken her six years to realize that chaos was a normal part of making change. "We always got to the order," she pointed out. She concluded that the video reminded her that her school couldn't have gotten to their level of order without first being chaotic, that being able to tolerate chaos was necessary although it was uncomfortable. A principal noted the metaphor of the clam, in which an irritating piece of sand eventually becomes a pearl. Another administrator mentioned that she needed to become more comfortable with the discomfort of chaos. A facilitator added that the alternative was "stagnation." Another participant voiced her belief that the degree to which we are able to tolerate chaos depends "on how brave we are, and a climate which allows us to do that." To this a principal noted her district's reluctance to accept chaos, as evidenced by their preference for a highly scripted comprehensive school reform model. A QUEST staff member suggested that this is where the importance of community involvement became clear, because the public school community "may not be able to see the larger picture" unless included in decision-making. Further, she noted, the general public and the government "[don't] like chaos because it challenges the status quo." Another staff member then distributed to the Scholars copies of an interview with Margaret

Wheatley on audiotape as "our gift to you," after which she announced an upcoming conference that participants might want to attend. The facilitators then announced that lunch was ready to be served.

Participants stood up, stretched, and went into the hallway, where a caterer had filled a table with food. The Scholars returned to the opposite side of the conference room with their plates and sat around four tables that had been pushed together to make a large square. One school had sent a team of three; this group sat together. The other participants sat around the square, talking in small groups of two or three. QUEST staff sat interspersed among Scholars, and were joined by an AEL writer, who began to discuss product development at 1:03 p.m. as lunch came to a close.

The writer handed out "Guidelines for Producing High-Quality Products," which she noted were being piloted by the communications group at AEL. The writer asked several questions for the Scholars to consider: Who is the audience for the product? What is a product? How would you scale-up this potential product? How would you transfer what you know to others? The Scholars began to answer with a few suggestions regarding the purpose of product development, which included "open[ing] the mind of the uninformed" and "sharing stories of hope and inspiration." An administrator said that she had used activities she had participated in at the previous rally during a day-long event at her school; she suggested that a description of the activities could become a package. A teacher suggested that test scores be compared across QUEST and non-QUEST schools, a suggestion that received no visible signs of support from other Scholars. There was a small silence after her utterance. But another participant quickly offered an idea—stories or case studies of QUEST schools. She noted that the reason her school didn't change previously was because "we didn't know *how*." Case studies might describe the change process in various QUEST schools. Another person suggested the publication of a book, perhaps coupled with a video. Other proposals included step-by-step explanations of how QUEST schools tackled change, with stories interspersed, and a video "that tell[s] the story of change." A staff member added that such a product could be used for professional development, and thus an additional product might be a facilitators' guide. Another suggestion was a publication concerning how to conduct a needs assessment—a "how-to" guide—with stories of QUEST schools' needs assessments included.

The writer then asked how QUEST might design "something to bring people together within a school without a leader." A Scholar replied that educators were "bombarded" by innovations because "everyone knows how to improve education." However, she added, "QUEST is a way to *take charge* of change." "It needs to be inspirational, motivational," said another. A principal spoke up, introducing herself to the writer: "Sort of selfishly, I don't want to give them [the QUEST staff] up, so I'm not suggesting anything." The group laughed loudly at this. But the principal continued, offering that she liked first receiving a brochure with general information about professional development programs and then later receiving a video and facilitators' guide "on which to build" her knowledge. This strategy, another participant contributed, "gives an aura of expertise." A facilitator submitted that the strategy could be piloted within the 18 QUEST schools. "We need to market change," offered a Scholar. To which the writer noted that QUEST was fortunate in this regard because, with the Porter-Obey legislation providing funds for adoption of comprehensive school reform models, "the government says 'you *have* to change.'" A QUEST staff member asked,

"But can you do it without coming together with other schools?" To which a participant replied, "No. You need to meet." The staff member returned, "So, it has to be some kind of network?" Several Scholars nodded and replied affirmatively. Making reference to the earlier joke, the writer warned, "You'll have to give [the facilitators] up with scaling-up and who will be your leader?" A principal replied with a story about how just as another intensive project had ended at her school, one of the QUEST facilitators had called inviting her school to participate. "And I thought that was *great*!" The group laughed, nodding their heads in agreement. Several participants reiterated the importance of having ready, accessible, and meaningful support from QUEST staff. The principal then further noted that the site visits, or co-ventures, had been helpful because "they pushed us to move more quickly" on various projects. A facilitator pointed out that "one function of networks is accountability," which another QUEST staff member said had been called "lateral accountability" as distinct from hierarchical accountability. A Scholar added, "Learners are leaders!" A student elaborated further that students must not be ignored in any QUEST endeavor: "Students must also want continuous improvement."

A facilitator said that she had been struck by the piece in the video shown earlier concerning vision as a field, and wondered, "How do you strengthen the field of vision?" "I hear we need a sense of the whole," she added. A Scholar shared that the "field theory part" of the video had also been meaningful to her. The writer soon rose and said that the discussion had answered many of her questions. She added that she would return the following day to talk more about product development, and "to absorb more of your thoughts." She asked participants to "do some thinking between now and then" about products. A facilitator added, speaking to the Scholars, "We hope to create an interim collaborative product that integrates with what you do . . . . We hope to commit to a something." The writer said, "We'll be keeping our finger on the pulse, helping you as you go along."

A QUEST staff member suggested that perhaps the group think about the creation of a series of products, including audiotapes, a medium that other Labs have successfully marketed. She added that "everyone in a school community are learners. So we need to think of others who are not generally included as the audience" in other school improvement products. While the writer handed out a survey concerning preferred types of education products, a principal noted the most valuable education products she had received concerned mainstreaming when that innovation had been newly in vogue; she had found the discrete modules on different topics, each providing a "bite-sized" portion of information, to be very useful. Each module had included audiotapes or articles in addition to other written materials. She concluded with two suggestions: articles reporting research findings should be included in a potential QUEST product (because these "add to the richness and rigor" of the project) and the product ought to focus on *continuous* improvement (because change is a "metamorphosis"). A facilitator quipped, "But what is a bite-sized portion?" To which another staff member replied, "Depends on the size of your mouth." The group guffawed. An administrator suggested, as the laughter subsided, that "we need to sell the value of networking of local schools." Another principal described the difficulty of such a task, particularly in small rural districts where competition is the modus operandi. Similar to an earlier proposal, a Scholar offered that any future QUEST product should include "readings" on school improvement. People reading the articles

"could become instigators," she added. A facilitator again attempted to bring the discussion to a close, saying to the writer, "Thanks, Anne [psuedonym]. They're a shy group." Everyone laughed.

As the writer left, the summer intern conveyed information about dinner arrangements and asked participants to place their lunch orders for the following day. She also collected additional paperwork associated with the Colloquium. Afterwards, the facilitators asked participants to reconvene on the other side of the room at different tables than those at which they had earlier been seated.

At 2:00 p.m., the facilitators began a new activity, called the Tuning Protocol Process. A QUEST staff member explained the aims of the activity, using an overhead labeled "Purposes of the Practice Protocol." The purposes listed were to (1) get feedback from QUEST Scholars on a workshop by QUEST staff, "Creating Energy for School Improvement," and piloted at the Tennessee Association of State School Administrators (TASSA) meeting in June; (2) to practice using a process for feedback called the "protocol"; and (3) assess whether the process would be useful to schools working to achieve continuous school improvement. Feedback, the staff member explained, should address the presenting team's essential questions, and should take two forms—warm, or supportive, and cool, or critical. She explained the roles that participants would play in the process: she would be the facilitator; the two Colloquium facilitators would be the presenters or analysts, as they would first proceed with a short description of their workshop and then with more extensive analysis of it; and the Scholars would be the reactors, later offering feedback. The process facilitator then handed out an "Agenda for Protocol," commenting that the process had originally been designed to provide teachers with feedback regarding specific classroom practices, but without creating a climate that might make them "defensive."

The presenters then briefly described the workshop, the document they created for the workshop, and a self-assessment instrument staff developed and piloted at the workshop. The agenda then called for reactors to ask clarifying questions. A student asked what the TASSA conference was; a presenter described it. One participant asked, "What interaction did you have with them [conference participants] regarding the self-assessment instrument?" One of the presenters answered, "Not much," but noted that several had reported that they found it useful. An administrator queried, "How does this instrument relate to the instrument we administered earlier?" In response, a presenter noted that the instrument developed by Shirley Hord concerned the five elements she believed contributed to a professional learning community (Meehan, Orletsky, & Sattes, 1997), whereas the QUEST self-assessment instrument addressed the six major components of the QUEST framework (see Appendix A). There were no further clarifying questions raised, so the facilitator continued.

The next part of the process allowed the presenters to analyze the workshop, in terms of content, process, audience, and results. The presenters shared their dilemmas in creating various parts of the workshop, the unexpected audience composition (they were not all administrators and many attended as school teams), a sense that certain activities did not work well, and that audience energy levels were low. After approximately 20 minutes of analysis, reactors were then allowed to

pose clarifying questions to the presenters. One Scholar asked if the workshop participants "felt that they took away something they could use," and how the presenters knew they felt this way. One presenter suggested that their responses to evaluative questions about the self-assessment instrument led her to believe that they found the instrument useful. Another Scholar asked, "You expected administrators but got others...did you make any modifications?" One presenter answered that while they had not altered any of the content presented, they did make sure to form heterogenous work teams. The second presenter added that they had not realized at first that teams from schools had attended and initially sat together as the workshop began; seating had thus been an unexpected issue.

Next, a Scholar asked to what extent the presenters had incorporated research about adult learning into the content or process of the workshop. Such research was embedded in the design of the workshop, replied a presenter. The final question concerned what outcomes the presenters had hoped for from the workshop. One of the presenters noted that they had not just intended participants to become aware of QUEST; rather, they had wanted them to "think hard" about the components of the QUEST framework and which ones their school might most benefit from considering.

The process facilitator next asked the reactors to form small groups to discuss the presenters' essential questions, which were listed on the "Agenda for Protocol." The evaluator participated in one group and the summer intern in another. Interestingly, the group in which the evaluator participated was comprised almost entirely of younger Scholars—two young teachers, and one student. A more experienced teacher also participated, but was relatively reticent. Perhaps as a consequence of the group composition, there was little discussion about the presenters' essential questions. Instead, each group member quickly mentioned a point of feedback, which was just as quickly written on poster board. When reminded by the process facilitator to agree collectively on several points to share with the presenters, the group raised no questions and did not debate the validity or usefulness of any of the points listed. The group generated seven points—four "warm" and three "cool." Once printed on poster paper, the group began conversing about children, test-taking, being hyperactive, sugar highs, and racial balance in schools.

On the other hand, the group in which the summer intern participated appeared to be more focused and analytical. At first, the group considered the issue of how much material was presented at the workshop, ultimately deciding that too much had been offered. Reflecting on their own experiences as QUEST participants, they felt that the facilitators talked too much. However, they also noted that the facilitators tended to have a very effective rapport when they are talking. The group also considered QUEST as a whole, with one teacher remarking, "QUEST leads teachers [students, parents, administrators] to answers—it doesn't package answers. That is the success of QUEST." Another issue the group discussed concerned the problem of describing the project, a quandary compounded by the vast amount of information made available to QUEST participants. One teacher added that in her own experience as a participant, she had at first felt "blind" and had only come to understand the QUEST framework slowly over time. However, one teacher felt the quotes from myriad sources were quite rich, and an administrator similarly felt that QUEST offered a good variety of activity and resources. Next, the group briefly discussed the unfortunate timing

of the workshop, shortly after the school year had ended. Too, the group debated whether the presenters' goals could feasibly be reached in a one-day workshop. While the goal was to have participants think deeply about the QUEST framework, the outcome may have been that participants were able to learn various techniques for conducting needs assessments or classroom activities. Finally, whether administrators were the most useful group to introduce QUEST to was discussed. Some group members wondered if the presenters should have held the workshop for teachers instead, and others thought that first introducing QUEST to administrators added an "extra step" because those administrators would then need to communicate the QUEST framework to teachers in their schools. At 3:31 p.m., the process facilitator announced a five-minute break.

When the Scholars reconvened, the process facilitator explained the final steps in the protocol process, whereby reactors would share their feedback with the presenters, who would then do some reflecting on the feedback they received. Each group reported several points of feedback to the presenters. These points included perceptions that the presenters may have lectured too much, that participants may have needed more advance information about QUEST, that additional activities might have been scheduled to increase participants' energy levels, and that more thought might have been given to how much content participants are able to process in a one-day workshop. Warm comments included descriptions of how "invaluable" the framework was. The presenters then asked a few questions: What might an advance brochure for QUEST look like? Could the TASSA document be chunked out to be useful to QUEST teams? Should we revisit the goals for the workshop? Next, the process facilitator asked participants to spend a few minutes reflecting in their journals about their impressions of, or learnings about, the protocol process itself. Most Scholars wrote quietly and diligently, although several appeared distracted, gazing around the room or fiddling with supplies.

At 3:55 p.m., facilitators requested that the Scholars share their reactions to the protocol process. An administrator noted that she could see how the process could be used to improve instruction, but felt that one would "have to set the stage for a low-risk environment." She further suggested that one might begin the process with a faculty member who was a risk-taker. A teacher added that it would take time for staff to become comfortable with the process. Another Scholar contributed that staff might find the process less threatening "because you know some criticism is coming." And, elaborated one of the facilitators, based on her experience minutes earlier as a presenter receiving critique, "you hear what you're ready to hear." A parent noted that she was concerned that "I was reflecting on your *perceptions*," rather than on the workshop itself. She was also worried that her feedback was "shallow" because the presentation was brief, not allowing for much elaboration. Scholars shared other concerns—that participants made too many positive comments and that the feedback may have been "artificial" as a result. But another participant felt that encouraging staff to share warm comments first might ease them into sharing the more difficult critical comments. In response to several of these concerns, one of the facilitators said she felt the warm comments the Scholars had offered were specific and thoughtful. She suggested that the process might work best with a small group rather than a whole faculty. One administrator briefly described a writing portfolio process at her school that struck her as similar to the protocol process; as a result, she said, "I can see this as a natural."

Already past 4:00 p.m., when the day's activities were scheduled to end, the facilitators quickly wrapped up. The project director announced that she would be unable to attend the remainder of the Colloquium and so said goodbye to the group.

Day Two

The Scholars began their second day of work at 8:40 a.m. on Friday, July 17, 1998, with a "warm-up" activity. Each person received an envelope containing several puzzle pieces. The facilitators announced that the pieces belonged to two different puzzles; the Scholars' task was to discover other participants with pieces to the same puzzle and then put the puzzle together as quickly as possible. The participants laughed and began the activity, ending it with quiet talking and strategizing about which pieces fit where. One group finished first, clapping, laughing, and congratulating each other. The second group took several minutes longer; a Scholar joked, "Maybe it's because our group consists almost entirely of administrators," a comment that received hearty laughter. One of the facilitators explained that the activity had illustrated that creative collaboration is enhanced by competition with another group, and that collaboration and competition can work in synergy.

Next, she continued, the Scholars would engage in a collaborative activity in groups as diverse as possible, with various grade levels, genders (she leaned toward the one male participant as she said this, prompting laughter from the Scholars), and ages. Each group would reflect on QUEST as each now understood it, examining how it operated in schools and impacted students, parents, and educators. Then the groups were to create a vision of how QUEST operated for school communities.

The evaluator and summer intern participated in the same group, which began by posing the question, "What is QUEST?" One Scholar offered that it concerns itself with "continuous school improvement, with emphasis on *continuous*." Another Scholar asked, "What are we trying to create?" To which one participant replied, "We are trying to create support" for QUEST schools, by creating and taking risks together. Another Scholar felt that QUEST was nurturing a sense of all education stakeholders as Successful, Motivated, Autonomous, Responsible, Thoughtful (SMART) learners. Still another participant offered that QUEST was creating a network, "building a sense of colleagues outside of our immediate environment." A group member asked, "Are we trying to create a process or a structure for schools to use?" One teacher felt that QUEST was a process, and an administrator thought that the project was a means of "examining possibilities." Another point made was that participants appreciated the "rich resources" of articles and references that QUEST staff made available. "It's wonderful to have these things brought to us," said a group member. Also laudable was the "different perspective" QUEST afforded; a Scholar referred to the way in which an excerpt from the movie *The Wizard of Oz* had been used to illustrate a point that was helpful in this regard. One Scholar thought that QUEST was an "intellectual challenge . . . . it requires us to engage our brain," an engagement that requires both time and distance from the "busy school environment." QUEST is also, noted another participant, the availability of "someone to call on, it

is E-mail, someone in cyberspace; it is someone to call and keep me close to the vision." Further, added one group member, it "rekindles the fire in the belly," reinforcing participants' passion for student learning and "elevat[ing] us above the day-to-day mundane existence." However, this participant asked, a leader needs followers, and how does one convince educators to "buy into" QUEST? The question went unanswered, but other participants continued to offer their thoughts. A Scholar contributed her sense of QUEST as a "place to ask questions," and offers participants an opportunity to "step out of our roles" because "the atmosphere of this group is such that we can be independent of roles and expectations." The group also reiterated their sense that the network component of QUEST was very important.

One group member had taken notes during the discussion, and with the rest of the group's input, began to fashion a statement. With several edits, another participant wrote a final sentence, which the evaluator then transferred to poster paper. This sentence was: "QUEST is a supportive network of educational communities committed to nurturing a continuous process of working toward school improvement by examining possibilities and resources as network members 'see' through others' perspectives." Meanwhile, several group members discussed preschool programs and opportunities for acquiring Americorps volunteers.

The facilitators then asked each group to read their vision statements. An administrator read the vision generated by the group in which the evaluator and summer intern participated. The vision statements created by the other two groups were:

QUEST possibilities for continuous school improvement:

- Enthusiasm, excitement, curiosity.
- Greater involvement of all parts of the community.
- Provide fertile ground and nurturing and guiding.
- Providing information through literature and networking.

Our QUEST Vision:

- QUEST is a skeleton on which everyone is growing and developing.
- QUEST is a shared way of thinking and working in schools, characterized by: creativity, collaboration, support, proactivity, synergy, becoming, sharing and developing leadership, motivation, inspiration, networking, and sharing research.

One participant wanted to add that the inspirational quotes one of the facilitators had occasionally posted on the QUEST listserv had been very meaningful; she reported that she had printed each one and posted them on the staff refrigerator for all staff to read. Another Scholar added that she had used the excerpts from research and the references she received over the listserv as catalysts for discussions with her staff. Apparently pleased, the facilitator said that she would commit to sending a quote to the listserv each Monday. Several participants then had a brief

discussion about teachers' lounges, one new teacher noting having been discouraged from going to the teachers' lounge at the school because it would have been demoralizing.

After each group had read their statement, the Scholars discussed as a whole group their reactions to the statements. One Scholar said that she thought that QUEST enabled diverse people to "be on the same playing field" together. A facilitator shared that she enjoyed hearing what QUEST was like in various schools. Apparently having had an earlier interaction with one administrator, the other facilitator asked the participant to share two metaphors. The first, she replied, had been an "object lesson," in which the teacher had turned off all the lights and then lit one match, asking students to take note of how much or little they were able to see around them. Then he lit a bound package of matches, and asked students to note how much more they were able to see. The point, he had explained, was that "coming together can shed so much light."

She had learned of the second metaphor during a church service. Everyone has two elbows and heels, she said, but if someone were to hold their elbows up in the air they would not make a good impression. But, she continued, everyone needs two elbows and heels and "we need not squash" those who need to display their elbows and heels because, reiterating a phrase the facilitators often repeat, "people are where they are." "The best teachers go where their students are and build from there," rejoined one participant. "It makes me think about how we have different frames of reference," added a student. "You have to put yourself in others' shoes." A facilitator pointed out that this notion was similar to the vision statement that alluded to "seeing" through other people's eyes. She then showed the group a copy of the magazine *Biography*, and briefly shared a biography she had read about Millard Fuller, the founder of Habitat for Humanity. She explained that he had made a fortune early in his life, but his wife had become unhappy with their materialistic lifestyle. They decided to give away their fortune and eventually founded the charitable organization. This, the facilitator elaborated, was an example of creative collaboration, in which two people with quite different perspectives "came together" to create something new. A Scholar agreed that it was important to find a shared vision. The intern submitted that it was also important to accept people with different perspectives as they are. She noted that some teachers complain about "bad kids"; her supervisor in a peace education and conflict resolution initiative with which she was involved had pointed out the incongruity of this attitude by saying that no one sent them (the peace program staff) the *wrong* kids. A facilitator contributed that in some schools "blame-placing is so draining." Instead, she said, "all of us need to build on positive energy." A Scholar suggested that perhaps blame-placing occurs because "maybe they're being unrealistic" and "maybe they're asking something that is not possible." Another added, "Maybe they're buying the media hype about the degeneration of kids." A facilitator ended the discussion, noting that the discussion provided "a lot of fertile ground for building on." Participants then took a ten-minute break.

The Scholars reconvened at 9:55 a.m. in their small groups. The facilitators distributed registration forms for the upcoming National Staff Development Council (NSDC) conference, and shared their "vision for us to maybe present next year" at the conference. They requested that Scholars think about other networks and professional organizations that might serve as forums for presentations about QUEST.

Then the facilitators asked the group to refocus their attention on another activity. One facilitator requested the Scholars to consider how they might self-assess their schools' performance in each of the components of the QUEST framework (see Appendix A). They then introduced the technique of school portfolios as a means to conduct self-assessments. After some brief description, the facilitators told participants that they would collectively inquire about whether QUEST schools would find it productive to develop and pilot school portfolios around the QUEST concepts. Through the afternoon and next morning, they explained, the Scholars would focus on three components of the QUEST framework as part of this task—learning culture, SMART learners, and core values. If school portfolios are determined to be feasible, the facilitators continued, the group would then consider what standards schools might use to assess levels of performance vis-a-vis framework components. One facilitator explained that the QUEST staff had originally thought they might write a book or produce a video, but had reconsidered and now thought perhaps school portfolios would be a more viable way to explore the framework elements in concrete settings.

The facilitators then described three purposes of school portfolios in the QUEST context: (1) to test/validate the QUEST constructs, (2) to portray examples of other schools, and (3) to serve as a process to be used by schools for self-assessment. They reminded participants that school portfolios were being presented as an idea for investigation, that the group would inquire together "to see if this is worthwhile for us to pursue."

To that end, the facilitators began such an investigation with an activity called Four Box Synectics. One facilitator asked a participant to name four appliances—he offered a blender, a coffee pot, a microwave, and a toaster. Using a piece of paper with four boxes drawn on it, participants were instructed to label each box with one of each of the appliances mentioned. Next, the facilitators asked participants to ask themselves how school portfolios were like each of the appliances. After several minutes of quiet writing and an occasional giggle, the staff asked the Scholars to each choose one simile to share with their group. Then the group was to choose one simile per appliance to share with the entire group. As they reported their similes, participants made various conjectures about school portfolios: they must contain a variety of data; they could be used as a display; they could be used to assess performance in particular areas of focus (i.e, parent involvement), similar to action research; they must be "living, breathing document[s]"; and they can be used to discover problems.

Next, one of the facilitators asked a principal to talk about her school's portfolio. The principal said that the portfolio had emerged as a result of work done by an action research team who had been looking for ways to measure results of their endeavors. Action research had focused on parent involvement, and so the team discussed what evidence they might collect to assess changes in parent participation. Eventually, the team chose to collect a variety of data, from attendance rates for the school, by grade and by teacher, to pictures of school events. The team collected survey data and began family portfolios that chronicled the types and quantities of family involvement. Student portfolios also were compiled, including data on achievement and accomplishments, particularly as they related to parent involvement. The action research team additionally took a random sample of school families and conducted a follow-up three years later. The team, consisting of seven teachers

and three parents, were responsible for the portfolio. She noted that her school devoted less time and energy to the portfolio lately because they were no longer working as intensively on change. A case study about her school had been published, and the impetus of "working on product" had disappeared. Still, she noted that her school conducted an intensive needs assessment each year. She concluded by comparing scrapbooks and portfolios: A scrapbook displays what your school has accomplished, but "to me, a portfolio is something you use."

A facilitator asked another principal to discuss her school portfolio. The principal replied that maybe it was a portfolio, but she didn't call it that. She described maintaining a portfolio concerning new teacher standards in her state and student portfolios as part of state assessments in writing and math. The principal conjectured elaborations of school portfolios she had been imagining—putting the portfolio on display, making the portfolio electronic, aligning the portfolio with accreditation processes. A facilitator agreed that school portfolios should be purposeful, but that they could indeed serve many purposes. She noted that the QUEST staff did not want to burden the Scholars and their QUEST teams with extra work—that if they choose to compile portfolios, staff hoped it would "be a part of the other work you do" as well as part of the QUEST collaboration. A Scholar replied that any information gathered for a portfolio could be used for other purposes as well.

The facilitator then asked participants to "think together" about how a portfolio might be used to assess or represent the QUEST constructs. One participant said that he had participated on a school renewal committee, which had compiled a portfolio. But he had been concerned that the portfolio had relied too heavily on statistical data and that the committee had chosen to include only flattering data. He felt that the portfolio could have been more constructively used as a "tool for improvement." Another participant agreed that it might have been an important opportunity for growth. The concerned participant then added that his school had ultimately been "hammered" by the accreditation team, and hence committee members now appeared to be more leery of presenting data selectively. A principal spoke up, noting that there was lots of information to be gathered for multiple purposes. She said, "We sometimes go on our merry way and don't see some things." She continued with a story. She reported that one year she noticed that 58% of incoming kindergartners in her school qualified for speech therapy, having just taken a screening prior to enrollment. This assessment, she explained, had only seemed to serve one purpose—to identify children for assistance with speech. But then she looked at the data from a different perspective and ultimately used it to justify the creation of a preschool program that would, in part, enhance the speech skills of students one year before they enrolled in her school. She reported that the percentages of incoming kindergartners qualifying for speech therapy had steadily declined since the institution of the preschool program. "The data had been there for 27 years, but I'd never looked at it," she concluded.

Concerning the difficulty of maintaining focus, one participant shared a metaphor. Water splashes all over the place when poured through a sieve, but it drains neatly when poured through a funnel, she explained. The participant said she thought she would hang one of each on her office wall to remind herself to remain focused. Another Scholar nodded vigorously. Then another noted that, "For me, the amount of data blurs my focus." A facilitator asked her if a school portfolio might

be a way of recapturing focus. To which one participant answered, "Yes . . . . the organization of the portfolio forces focus," because if one saw low levels of achievement reported in a portfolio, one would be compelled to investigate the reasons for such achievement.

At 10:51 a.m., one of the facilitators previewed the next day of activity, during which Scholars would join one of three task teams each addressing one of three constructs from the QUEST framework. The constructs were core values, learning culture, and Successful, Motivated, Autonomous, Responsible, Thoughtful (SMART) learners, and the group as a whole would focus on each throughout the next day. The task teams were to pay special attention to whole group work concerning their construct; if they eventually chose to compile school portfolios around their construct, such discussions might prove informative. The facilitator reminded participants to be thinking about what data might be included in a portfolio concerning each construct.

After a brief energizing activity, the facilitators distributed and explained the instructions for administering the Gregorc Style Delineator (1985). They added that the instrument would help participants form groups with members having diverse learning styles. The Scholars and staff completed the self-assessment quietly and intently, with some apparently self-conscious giggling and joking as they read their results. At 11:15 a.m., the facilitators asked group members to share their results and then share group profiles with the whole group. The Scholars appeared to enjoy this activity very much, comparing results and kidding one another.

At 11:36, participants were asked to read a handout about core values and then discuss with their task group members what insights they gained from the reading or what ideas struck them as important. After this activity, the Scholars would then have a chance to dialogue, a way of conversing distinct from discussion. The room quieted as participants read. Many highlighted sentences or phrases that appeared significant to them; some munched on snacks as they read.

At 11:46, the group in which the evaluator participated began to discuss the reading. One Scholar noted that core values were prior to the creation of a school vision. Another said that the variety of values people held made school improvement difficult, to which a teacher responded with an anecdote about the struggles single mothers faced and how these made parent involvement challenging. "It's hard for a school to have common values with families that have so many different values," said one group member. A teacher asked if high mobility rates were an issue at other participants' schools. One Scholar shared that his school had an "elitist" reputation in its district. Another shared the conflict that arose when inclusion was instituted in her school because teachers had such different notions of what constituted inclusion.

At 11:55, one of the facilitators asked the whole group to reconvene. She said that one of the QUEST goals was to develop a learning community; one method for enhancing a learning community was to nurture the habit of dialogue. What generally happens in groups, she explained, was discussion. In dialogue, however, participants "listen to truly understand" each other, ask clarifying questions, and paraphrase each others' statements. This, she elaborated, was distinct from the "ping pong" of discussion. A Scholar added that, "in true Socratic, Platonic dialogue," one first

needed to "formulate something defensible" to say. A facilitator asked that the task group focusing on core values be involved in a dialogue, or a "fishbowl," as she described the sensation that sometimes arose during dialogue.

The core values task group pulled their chairs in a circle, and the rest of the Scholars sat in a wide outer circle to listen. One participant began by noting her belief that core values "provide focus for improvement." Another Scholar then asked how a school community arrives at core values, to which the first participant replied that "there has to be a mechanism for sharing" diverse values, but the process also "requires leadership." One Scholar added that parents had different views than school staff that needed to be included. Another agreed that there were many views that needed to be included. A facilitator asked how a school would define achievement. "If respect for diversity is a core value, and we know there are a range of student abilities, what does it say if standardized test scores are *the* measure? Is student achievement specific enough?" she asked. A Scholar responded that it was not clear enough, but theorized that "talking about what student achievement is begins to surface core values." Another Scholar noted that what constitutes achievement needs to be decided at the local school level. One group member observed that whereas one of the Scholars worked at a school where 18% of the students qualified for free or reduced lunches, she worked at a school in which 83% qualified. This disparity, she said, impacts the diversity of values in communities. Another participant shared that realtors brought prospective buyers to her school because they felt the school was a "good" one; she wondered what they meant by such a determination. One person suggested a focus group with realtors to understand their criteria.

The facilitator then refocused the group, asking, "I think I heard you say that you believe the way values are surfaced is through a combination of mechanisms to enable conversation about values and leadership . . . . could you say more about the role of the principal in surfacing values?" To which the participant who had made such a statement answered that although principals have many roles to play, they often become "trapped in management of the school." Leaders need followers, and followers are gained by the sharing of values, she explained. "So you need to make *your* values known," and find out "what do people in this organization believe," as well. One way to do this, she said, was to observe school people in order to discern their values; another way, she explained, was more chaotic, in that a principal would force some "dissidence" in order to ultimately "converge on values." She said that such a principal would need to be intuitive to remember that "some people don't know what they believe." She also noted that "personal style makes the difference." Another Scholar agreed, saying "I like what you said—sharing [your values] for their consideration. You're the architect, but you're not imposing" your perspective. To which the first participant said, "Arriving at beliefs is a personal journey. It takes different amounts of time" for different people. "We are where we are," she added, and went on to discuss her sense that schools need to support both students and parents by creating a climate in which everyone involved can arrive at shared values and goals.

At this point, one of the facilitators asked the group to discontinue their dialogue. One Scholar praised the group, "Great job!" The remainder clapped. The facilitator requested that the

Scholars write in their journals for a few minutes on the experience of dialogue. As they began, one participant asked the Scholar who had participated most actively in the dialogue to comment on the experience of being in the "hot seat." The participant replied that "it's probably in my nature to start off," adding that she began to feel both responsible for the dialogue and as though she were monopolizing it. To which the querying participant replied, "Oh, no, not at all. I thought it was wonderful." Another group member asked, "How many of us really involve ourselves in dialogue? My guess is not many . . . . It made me reflect on how I don't spend much time listening and processing before asking the next question." Another Scholar agreed that time constraints made dialogue difficult. "Discussion is quicker," said one. "That's probably why we're more comfortable with it," returned another. "Listening is tough for we educators," one participant added, "because we're used to being on the telling side." A facilitator elaborated, "Likewise, we're used to being on the *knowing* side." A participant said that she thought dialogue would be an important habit to teach to students, but "very difficult to do." Another added it would be difficult to teach because "they've never spent their lives doing it . . . . because of the press to get things done." Regarding the challenge of teachers engaging in dialogue, one participant noted that teachers are "listening for the correct answer. If we don't hear the correct one, we hear nothing." One of the facilitators then noted that she was struck by the feeling of being in a "container" during the dialogue, adding that perhaps dialogue in schools would be aided by the provision of a "place apart" within a school for dialogue. She added, laughing, "You know I do like to talk, but I found myself listening." A participant agreed, "I started out by zipping up," which she said was "very good." The facilitators then announced that lunch was ready to be served, and the group disbanded.

Lunch during the second day of the Colloquium was much livelier than during the first, with little small-group interaction and lots of joking in the context of the whole group, particularly around the subject of Appalachian culture and stereotypes. No one appeared to take offense at such jokes.

At 1:10 p.m., the AEL writer returned to discuss potential QUEST products. She noted that at the end of the five-year Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) contract, QUEST would no longer receive funding. How then, she asked, would new schools learn about QUEST? Without the financial support provided by the REL contract, how could staff scale-up the project? Participants made a number of suggestions: presentations and displays at professional conferences, joint ventures with state departments of education or for-profit education organizations, and even seeking funding from political figures. One of the facilitators noted that training is difficult to market. She suggested that QUEST be marketed in one of the AEL publications, but added that while marketing in print was easiest to accomplish, it was likely "not the best way to make change in schools." A participant said that the network component of QUEST was important, so much so that she saw it as a recurring theme in the QUEST visions Scholars had written earlier. The writer agreed that part of the problem was "how to market the unmarketable."

A Scholar asked how current QUEST schools were chosen to participate; he added that he asked in order to "know how to find other schools." Staff said that they had relied on AEL Board recommendations, state department nominations, previous AEL contacts with schools, and "serendipity." One facilitator elaborated that potential QUEST schools were chosen in part because

they were "ready" for improvement; QUEST was not intended for schools struggling to survive. The other facilitator added that QUEST schools were elected because they were "already committed to improvement." A Scholar then suggested liaisons with colleges of education, saying, "QUEST is a natural for teacher prep programs." The writer agreed, but explained that the Labs had historically been committed to working with K-12 schools, but had had little connection with higher education. She then asked the Scholars what they thought about the name QUEST in terms of marketing, mentioning that some people might find it unclear or reminiscent of a computer game. The group brainstormed a few name changes, including "QUEST for Quality Schools." One participant shared her knowledge of foundation funding opportunities, and one of the facilitators asked participants whether they were interested in writing articles in collaboration with staff. Most Scholars raised their hands in response. The writer concluded by inviting the Scholars to consider submitting articles to the AEL newsletter.

After a brief break, the Scholars reconvened at 2:06. During the next activity, participants were asked to reflect individually about the three or four most important core values at their schools, providing an example of how each is manifested. The group in which the intern participated shared the values they felt were most important at their schools. Each of the participants in this group were able to list at least three such core values. The group in which the evaluator participated had more difficulty naming core values, and instead had discursive interchanges about the ways state mandates constrained teachers from enacting their values. One of the facilitators also participated and shared her perception that although the school her son attended claimed to value teaching responsibility, she feared that on a deeper level the school in fact valued compliance. Later in the discussion, she asked the group members if they thought it was important for schools to discuss their core values. They did, adding that a competent leader would help give voice to those values by helping staff "see beyond the day-to-day" trivia.

At 2:50, the facilitators asked each group to share with the larger group. One participant said that it had been easier for the team from Belleton [pseudonym] to name their core values because they continuously discussed such matters. One group noted that many of the values they named individually were similar across the group. A participant pointed out that the elementary schools appeared to value parent involvement more highly than the high schools. Another shared her group's insight that "walking the talk" was vitally important. Participants also discussed briefly the need to talk about core values in order to know what each means. However, the whole group did not discuss the ways in which the core values they named manifested themselves in their schools.

At 3:06 p.m., the group took a break, during which Scholars stood around a table filled with snacks, talking and laughing. Other participants played with the toys QUEST staff had provided. At 3:20, staff asked the Scholars to reconvene in order to watch a video interview with Phillip Schlechty called *Creating a Capacity for Change*. Participants seemed attentive during this activity, sometimes laughing as they heard an amusing phrase or turn of words. The video ended at 3:56. Reiterating Schlechty's theme of creating meaningful work for students, one of the facilitators relayed a comment a student had made to her during her co-venture at one of the QUEST schools. She said that he had commented that although he generally found school meaningful, the "drone

work" impeded his learning. In closing, she announced that the other facilitator would be unable to attend the final day of the Colloquium due to a prior engagement. Participants then stood up, stretched, and collected their belongings. Some said good-bye to the facilitator, and others networked. One teacher asked another about her school's parent involvement initiatives. Gradually, the group dispersed for the afternoon.

Day Three

The final day of the Colloquium began at 8:38 a.m. as participants arrived. At 8:41, the facilitator welcomed the Scholars again, and then announced that they would begin by focusing individually and then in small groups on one of three questions concerning QUEST as a whole. Each group would receive one question on which to focus. This activity would contribute to the planning and evaluation of the project, she noted.

The evaluator listened as one group discussed the following question: "Of all the QUEST experiences you have had, which have led to, or inspired, specific action on your part (your team's part, your school's part)?" One young teacher said that her attendance at one rally had provided her "lots of ideas from more veteran teachers," adding that she was now "more sympathetic to all learners in my classroom." She described a variety of school improvement ventures at her school. The evaluator asked if these had been instituted prior to her school's participation in QUEST; she replied that they had been.

Another teacher replied that his attendance at a rally had been "more on a personal level." He then described returning after the rally and conducting a "mini-QUEST" with his students, asking them "what would you change about this class." Next, he requested that his students provide solutions to the problems they saw. He said that they named problems such as "we talk too much in class" and "we get too much help from our neighbors." The students reported that they relied too heavily on him for help; their solution was to create a mechanism for tracking the extent to which they asked for help. A participant said, "You definitely made them the customer," making reference to one of the points made in the video of Phillip Schlechty. Another said, "By empowering them [the students] you made the classroom more powerful." The teacher described another problem and solution. Having noted that tardiness was a problem, his students then designed a means to reward promptness. They decided that if the whole class was on time Monday through Thursday, the teacher would work some sort of fun activity into Friday's class. After that, the teacher said, "I don't think we had five tardies until the end of the year." He also said that the students were much less likely to complain about restrictions that they had created themselves. One group member then said that QUEST was a "way of stepping back" and evaluating her work; it was also reenergizing for her to attend QUEST events. Likewise, another group member said that she had been reenergized, as had the more experienced teachers with whom she worked. Said another, "It makes my feet touch the ground . . . . [reminding me] this is why I'm here."

At 8:58, the facilitator asked the Scholars to share their answers to the questions. The first group to reply had considered the questions, "How, if at all, has your understanding of continuous school improvement changed as a result of your participating in QUEST? What activities, encounters, or materials have most influenced your understanding?" One Scholar felt that QUEST had "deepened" her understanding of improvement, increased her depth of commitment and involvement, and provided the focus necessary for ongoing improvement. Another participant said that QUEST had "forced me to think about it [school improvement]." Still another said that it had raised her awareness concerning the variety of school improvement work taking place, as well as the work that still needed to be done. One Scholar voiced her perception that QUEST was valuable because "with QUEST, you don't have to be elected . . . . People have the opportunity to come and help with the QUEST project." Another said that she had enjoyed "learning how deeply other educators are thinking about the same things [as I am]." In terms of what activities or materials participants had found most influenced their understanding of improvement, "collaborative examination," peer discussion, reflection, networking, and research articles ranked high. One participant also mentioned that the listserv had been useful.

A second group had considered the questions, "In what ways, if at all, does QUEST differ from other conferences you have attended or other professional development activities in which you've been involved? In what ways do these differences help, impede, or fail to impact continuous improvement in your school?" This group listed five differences on poster paper: (1) QUEST involves "inquiry learning," (2) QUEST has "extremely well-prepared presenters," (3) QUEST staff model best practices, (4) QUEST is a relatively small group, and (5) QUEST staff and participants have "high involvement" in the project. Two participants shared their sense that the diversity of participants in QUEST made the project unique. The group then discussed their answers to the second part of their question. One participant said that QUEST helped school improvement because it created "cognitive dissonance" in participants, illustrating the disparity between "what needs to be done and what gets done." Normally, she continued, one attends a conference, feels energized during the activities, and then returns to paperwork and phone calls, quickly becoming uninspired again. But, she continued, because of the QUEST network's "closeness" and the staff's leadership, participants are "motivated to be on task . . . . because someone may call and say, 'What are you doing?'" So, she concluded, QUEST motivates one to be on task despite the "spontaneity of responsibilities."

Another participant said that she thought one of the reasons QUEST helped school improvement was that "this is ongoing . . . . there are expectations to continue." Other professional development events are "one-shot events," she contrasted. Even those that are ongoing offer different foci over time, she added. Other events, another Scholar said, "are discussions, not dialogue." A participant asked the facilitator, "Is there a vision out there in the literature that [QUEST staff] are heading toward?" The facilitator replied that they hoped QUEST schools might develop a common vision, but the research indicated that schools were quite different and hence each school would create and enact their own unique vision. The querying participant asked further, "Beyond QUEST, is it [the literature on school improvement] that open?" The facilitator replied

that, yes, she thought so, and briefly summarized the work of a few renowned school change theorists.

The evaluator reported responses to the third question, noting that participants had felt re-energized by QUEST events, had "stepped back" to evaluate their work, and that one participant had empowered his students to make classroom decisions. One of the group members added that "it's very important to step back and 'objectivize'. . . . to ask 'is this [classroom practice] valuable or not?'" One Scholar said that the co-ventures had been valuable because "their mission is *only* school improvement, not accreditation or testing . . . . I know I can trust what they [QUEST staff] say is on target . . . . there are no hidden agendas." Another Scholar agreed, "It's nice to have someone say you're doing okay when the rest of the county doesn't think so." Her colleague added, "Most schools are alone in school improvement . . . . there's strong pressure to stay within the status quo."

The group then had some further discussion about the "mini-QUEST," reiterating the power of shared leadership. Meanwhile, two teachers quietly networked, one agreeing to send the other some information on a character education program. The discussion then turned to marketing public education success in order to counteract current "bitter criticism" of the institution. "We failed to toot our own horn," she said. She pointed out that the mini-QUEST had likely not been shared with the teacher's school community, for instance. The facilitator said that "we need to get [him] to write his story." She continued, explaining that QUEST was grounded in the belief that change is an "inside-out" process; hence, one can't force people to change their beliefs. A Scholar returned that "good things" had been taking place in classrooms prior to the recent pressure for educational change; the problem, she said, was that the public was not aware of such good things. Further, she noted, criticisms levied at schools "have really been about society." The facilitator mentioned that she had noticed a book critical of public education in several book stores, and had chosen each time not to read it. But she said she thought that it was important to read the critics of public education. The Scholar added, "I don't mean to imply that we don't need change . . . . "

The facilitator announced a ten-minute break, after which the Scholars would spend some time thinking about and discussing SMART learners in the context of school portfolios. At 10:04 a.m., the facilitator called the Scholars to order and asked each task group to think of as many uses of a tin can as possible. Participants were to write these on poster paper; amidst much laughing and yelling, the Scholars named a wide variety of possible ways to use a tin can. "Hey! You looked!" a Scholar accused another in a competing group. After several minutes of brainstorming, the participants were asked to read their lists, counting the number of ideas each had accumulated. Then the facilitator read a whimsical children's book, *What Can You Do with a Shoe?* (DeRegniers, 1997), in which one character imagines many unusual uses for various household objects while another is unable or unwilling to do so.

At 10:14, the facilitator asked the Scholars to read a selection concerning SMART learners. She requested that they "read critically, and also as an editor," thinking, too, of their own assumptions concerning SMART learners. After several minutes of silent reading, she asked that the Scholars write their assumptions in their journals, then choose one that "most influences the way

you think about SMART learners" to write on a Post-it note, which they were to stick on an easel near their group. Participants were next to "silently reflect and record what you're learning and feeling" as they read others' posted assumptions. The group wrote quietly and with apparent concentration, some underlining sections of the reading, others jotting brief notes. By 10:32, the Scholars had completed this part of the activity, and so the facilitator continued. She asked that, within each task group, one person begin by selecting another group member's posted assumption and then pose questions concerning that assumption. She said that each interaction ought to take approximately three minutes. This activity, she said, was called the "Assumptions Wall."

The group in which the evaluator participated approached this activity with energy. One posted assumption was that students learn best when they think through learning. A group member asked what the writer of this assumption had intended; the writer said that she had meant that students learn more fully when they are "making connections with other ideas." The querying participant returned, "See, I thought you meant they learned best when they thought about the *process* of learning." Another strand concerned an assumption that students need to believe in their own capabilities in order to become SMART learners. The group discussed ways in which students could be brought to a belief in their potential, such as providing opportunities for success, "get[ting] to know students to help them relate knowledge to a personal level" and teaching students "*how to* problem-solve." One teacher then shared that she felt guilty because she had gotten frustrated with a student who had appeared to master a skill earlier that week, but by week's end seemed to have forgotten it. The conversation turned to the sense of helplessness teachers sometimes feel and their simultaneous knowledge that their impact on students may be profound. The group then continued with the activity. One Post-it read "intrinsic desire to learn," the author of which elaborated that she thought that the practice of paying children for good grades conveyed the message that learning was a "terrible task," one that required virtual bribery. How does one make students think learning is exciting when "it's been ingrained that [school]work leads to stickers and rewards," asked another Scholar. One group member suggested tentatively, "Make what you're teaching meaningful to their future? Like, now you can balance your checkbook." Another participant noted that it is "hard to break the habit of expecting rewards in second graders," and then continued with an apparently quite genuine plea for guidance in this arena, sharing her concern that her students were already accustomed to receiving extrinsic motivators. In support, one of the group members described her daughter's hurt at the experience of not winning an award in first grade that she had hoped to acquire, adding that extrinsic motivators also were potentially harmful for those who did not receive them when they were made available.

At 11:05, the facilitator asked the groups to briefly describe whether their interchanges concerning assumptions had been more like discussions or dialogues. All three groups said that they had used a combination of both. The facilitator also asked if the "Assumptions Wall" had stimulated more dialogue than might otherwise have occurred. Many Scholars thought that it had. When asked why, one participant replied that although there were several assumptions to discuss, the process emphasized consideration of one at a time. Another contributed that the experience had been "very affirming" because those in her group had shared many assumptions; she added that she would have also liked "to see what'd happen if we talked about something we disagreed on." The facilitator

suggested, "I think something different happened than if we had just read and discussed," to which the Scholars collectively agreed. The facilitator asked participants if they thought the activity might prove useful in their schools. Several answered affirmatively, one Scholar noting that "the only thing I don't like is that you can't listen at all the tables."

At 11:15, the facilitator introduced an activity called "Interview Design," in which all participants interview and are interviewed regarding their thoughts on several issues. Two rows of chairs were set up facing one another, one pair of chairs per question. As the process began, participants faced each other and took turns asking the question found on the seat of their chairs, and recording each other's answer. Next, the facilitator asked that each participant in only *one* of the rows move to the seat to his or her right, while the participant on the end of the row moved to the seat at the beginning of the row. Then the process continued with participants asking the new people with whom they found themselves faced the question they had found on their original seats. This seat-switching continued until all the questions were asked of all the participants. The Scholars engaged in the activity energetically, scrunching their faces in concentration when answering questions they found challenging and busily writing notes as interviewees spoke. The facilitator allotted two minutes to each question; some participants found that they had more to say when time was called, while others provided their answers more quickly.

As this part of the activity drew to a close, the facilitator asked the Scholars to talk about the process. One participant said, "I thought it was wonderful," and another said that she thought it was "a good way to start looking at school improvement."

The next phase of "Interview Design" involved analyzing the data generated. All of the participants asking a particular question assembled as a group to compile their data and look for trends in the answers they received. The facilitator then asked participants if they had any further comments about the process. One replied, "This process gives us so much complexity, depth."

The group broke for lunch at 12:10, the facilitator announcing that the group would conclude the Interview Design process after lunch. One Scholar left shortly after lunch, needing to return home for a prior obligation. Staff and Scholars hugged her and thanked her for attending. Many Scholars completed paperwork during lunch to ensure reimbursement for travel expenses. After lunch, the principal from one school described their utilization of a program called "Microsociety," in which children create and participate in a society modeled after the larger society. The Scholars listened quite attentively, laughing at amusing anecdotes concerning the program, and nodding their heads in apparent understanding or appreciation. Afterwards, the facilitator asked participants if "we should take an hour at upcoming rallies for each school to share like this?" While there was no consensus, several participants nodded their heads in apparent agreement. One Scholar replied, "And if they write it up before, they would have a product."

The final phase of "Interview Design" involved summarizing the data. One representative from each group gave a brief presentation of the trends their group had found in the answers they analyzed. The synthesis of answers to each question follow.

Question A: What kind of evidence would you look for in a classroom to document that SMART learning was being promoted?

- High activity/energy.
- Mutual respect.
- Student-centered, collaborative learning.
- Student products on display.
- Variety.
- Teacher as facilitator.
- Higher order thinking.
- Positive chaos.
- Fun.
- Relevant learning.
- Provide opportunities for student success.
- Students feeling good about accomplishments.
- Variety of materials/learning activities.
- Text as a reference, not a bible.

Question B: In what ways can we encourage students to accept SMART learning as a personal goal?

- Model a lot.
- Have administrators and teachers — entire school system — "walk the talk."
- Intrinsic rewards.
- Involve students with self assessment.
- Better way of evaluating student progress.
- Inform students and system of what SMART learners are.
- Encourage students to be independent.
- Encourage risk taking and that it is okay to fail.
- More collaboration among students.
- Make learning FUN!!!
- More open-ended questions.
- Allow for self-discovery and self-assessment.
- Demonstrate learning to peers and teachers.

Question C: If SMART learning were a goal for your school, what would this mean for assessment practices? How might you monitor individual student development?

- Place less reliance on ABCDF grades and standardized tests.
- Assessment would focus on individual student growth. Written, oral, projects (authentic).
- Milestones would involve students, teachers, parents in various conferencing groups.
- Extensive retraining of teachers, students, and parents.
- Other: projects, portfolios, conferences, reflection logs, presentations/exhibits, real-life problem solving, self-assessment, teacher observations, peer tutoring, and level of involvement.

Question D: Reflect on your experience both in and outside the classroom. Recall a time when you were personally performing as a SMART learner or when you observed someone else who evidenced these traits. Share this experience in story form.

The stories shared were too long to summarize, although the group analyzing answers to this question noted that many of the stories were about the experience of writing.

After the presentation of Interview Design findings, one of the Scholars asked if she could share a "tiny story." The facilitator agreed, and the participant began. She said that her school had invited an author to speak to the students about writing and publishing. He gave presentations in

several classrooms, and concluded his visit with a presentation to a larger group. At the end of the presentation, the Scholar had walked out of the meeting room with a class of kindergartners. She asked one young girl whether she had learned anything during the presentation. The child replied, "Oh, yes, I learned a lot, but part of the time he was speaking in cursive." The Scholars laughed loudly and energetically at this story, spending several minutes discussing the comment and theorizing about the child's thinking.

At 1:36 p.m., the group was asked to spend 10 or 15 minutes reading the creeds QUEST members had written. Scholars from high schools were to read and edit the creeds written by members of the high school network, and the elementary school Scholars were to do the same with the elementary creeds. The facilitator requested that participants read the creeds, asking themselves, "Does this express what we're about?" She further asked them to consider, "Would it be important for us to have a creed? To say to schools who want to join, this is what we believe?" In addition, she asked that they consider whether they should have one creed for the whole network or one each for the high school network and the elementary network. The evaluator sat with the high school Scholars; they began their work haltingly, asking each other procedural questions several times. One participant said that she had not attended the rally at which the creeds had been developed, and she therefore could not be certain what meanings had originally been intended. The group decided to change the word "persistence" to "perseverance" in one statement. One Scholar, a parent, asked that the group add "positive" before "change process"; two educators replied that they thought change for the better was implied, and certainly within the context of QUEST it was so. The parent also said that she did not like the phrase "instructional delivery," noting that she would prefer a phrase that was more "student-centered." Two of the educators, one after the other, said that such language was jargon, "widely understood within education," as one put it. The parent continued to appear skeptical, but the group continued with a few more minor edits. The facilitator asked the two groups to share their reactions briefly. The high school group said that they had made a few editing changes, had clarified the meaning of some statements, but generally liked the creeds. The elementary group reported similar changes, but added that they also hoped to condense the creeds into five or six "powerful" statements.

Next the facilitator briefly discussed plans for the Scholars to reconvene just prior to the next rally in November, and assigned two Scholars primary responsibility for editing the creeds, which would be shared at the rally. Although the facilitator talked, many Scholars chatted and joked amongst themselves. The facilitator announced a brief break.

At 2:20, the group was called back together. The facilitator asked participants to complete an inventory intended to assess the relative strengths of their "seven intelligences." The group was then asked to share the domains in which they received the highest and lowest scores. After an energizing activity, the facilitator introduced an activity concerning the third QUEST framework component, learning culture. The Scholars were asked to read a selection regarding learning culture, then silently write their answers to the question posted on an easel nearest the table at which they sat. After each group answered their question on the easel, the facilitator directed them to travel to the next easel over and answer the question listed there. The groups rotated until they had answered

all the questions. As one group attempted to answer one of the questions concerning strategies for improving learning culture, the writer, who had joined the Colloquium activities again, pointed out, "But these [answers] look like results to me, not strategies." The group then began to provide answers that were more clearly strategies. The questions and answers for this activity are below.

Question 1: What evidence of a learning community would you look for in a real school setting? How would you collect the evidence?

- Collaboration: jointly developed instructional units, interdisciplinary instruction, how planning takes place? Committee work?, and how are decisions made?
- Articulation of shared beliefs: interviews of stakeholders.
- Physical environment: pictures, observations.
- SMART learners: student work, teacher work, exhibits, inquiry, parents, cooperative learning.
- Site visits: data in a day, walk through, school portfolio, and interviews (sample whole school community and ask "is school exciting?" and "how often are you anxious, bored?"
- School/staff/student self-assessment: subjective assessment of atmosphere.

Question 2: What kinds of strategies can school leadership use to strengthen learning culture? Specific techniques?

- Open, frequent communication.
- Trustworthiness, entrust with responsibility, empowerment.
- Symbols (mottos, heros, traditions, mascots).
- Fostering risk taking.
- Tradition building and tradition wrecking.
- Promoting mutual respect, model respect.
- Protect academic time.
- Developing school spirit.
- Structures for collaboration.
- Celebrate progress as well as achievement.
- Foster leadership development.
- Shared leadership.
- Provide opportunities for growth on part of staff, students, and parents.
- Identify strengths/weaknesses.
- Leaders should act as models.
- Leader(s) should be visible and available.
- Provide time and resources for faculty sharing.
- Engage members who have isolated themselves.

Question 3: What are the barriers to the development of strong learning cultures in schools? How can you work to overcome these?

- Uncollaborative people.
- Transfers.
- Solution: establish core values.
- Buy-in find.
- Punitive central office/weak leadership.
- Status quo.
- Politics.
- Limited resources.
- Apathy.

- Solution: folklore, tradition.
- Solution: education - training.
- Solution: providing time for awareness/staff and parent dialogue.
- Solution: administration supports, shares leadership.
- Solution: building a shared vision.

Each group then briefly reported the answers to their questions. Next, the facilitator asked the participants to complete a self-assessment about their school around the six QUEST framework components. A parent asked the evaluator, "Are we going to turn this in?" The evaluator answered that she didn't think so. To which the parent replied, "Because I don't know a lot of these [details asked for on the self-assessment]. I don't know what's going on in their rooms." After completing the assessment, the facilitator asked the Scholars if they might be willing to pilot it in their schools and how it might be useful to them. One participant said simply, "I like it." Another replied, "It scared the heck out of me! I scored us very low." After a few more comments, the facilitator said she was giving the Scholars a challenge, to "take this back to your QUEST teams only—have them complete the instrument and then try to dialogue about it and see how it works." She further requested that the participants critique the self-assessment for QUEST staff so that they could improve it. "Is this a task the Scholars would be willing to take on?" she asked. Many Scholars nodded and said yes. The facilitator promised to send a memo reminding them of this task and some blank instruments for their teams to complete.

Next, the facilitator asked the task groups to "think back to portfolios . . . . think about how you might develop criteria for a portfolio . . . . what evidence might you collect? What can you commit to doing?" The evaluator continued to participate in the task group on learning culture. This group discussed including photos of committee meetings and school exhibits to document learning culture. Other data that the group considered included videos of classrooms in which inquiry learning was apparent, lists of the schools' visions and goals, meeting agendas, evidence of training educators had received, interviews with community members, school histories, survey results, lists of school committees, schoolwide plans, and examples of student work. The facilitator traveled from group to group, announcing that each should designate one person to ensure that the task group keep in contact as they collaborated in compiling portfolios around their constructs. Members of the learning culture group appeared unwilling to assume this responsibility. No one volunteered; instead, members actively volunteered other members. Ultimately, one participant accepted another member's nomination of him. The facilitator said that she would stay in touch with the primary contact for each group.

On a large marker board at the front of the conference room, staff had created a large grid representing various opportunities for collaboration. The Scholars were instructed to sign up for those activities in which they would like to participate. These options were to give presentations at professional conferences or QUEST rallies, to author or co-author articles, and to participate in co-ventures at other QUEST schools. Seven Scholars indicated their interest in presentations, six in writing articles, and eight in participating in co-ventures. One participant asked the facilitator if QUEST had any plans to videotape rallies; the facilitator said that they might consider doing so.

At 4:06 p.m., the facilitator announced that the Colloquium had come to a close. She applauded the Scholars and their diligent work, and thanked QUEST staff for their assistance. The writer added that she wanted to say a bit more about product development. She asked the Scholars to keep their focus on product creation as they went back to their schools, to be thinking about how what they are doing by way of school improvement could perhaps apply to product development. She continued that they ought to save their work when they were able, to write stories and journal entries—in sum, to "hold on to everything," because such work "is about how people are impacted" by QUEST. The facilitator then reminded the group that she hoped their dialogue would continue on the listserv, and that she would commit to posting a quote every Monday. She concluded by sharing that she felt that "this group has the potential to be a 'great group'!"

The Scholars slowly departed, several staying a while longer to chat and hug goodbye. One teacher expressed his fear that the energy he felt during the Colloquium would dissipate once he returned to his school. The facilitator reassured him, "We're gonna work with you. We're committed!" Others gathered their belongings, and a few exchanged promises to remain in contact. By approximately 4:30, the Scholars had all departed.

FINDINGS

The following section reports results concerning the degree to which Colloquium goals were met. This section also reports participant reaction to the Colloquium generally. Data include participant observation field notes, evaluation questionnaires, and unstructured interviews.

Co-Creation

The first two Colloquium goals were that QUEST staff and Scholars would "co-create" network activities and products. In fact, the Scholars did not create either. However, they did contribute many suggestions to several discussions concerning possible QUEST products. These included books and articles, stories of member schools' improvement efforts, training modules, and videotapes. The Scholars also suggested ways in which QUEST might be sustained beyond the REL contract. Further, many indicated that they were willing to co-author articles and conference presentations with QUEST staff, and participate in co-venture site visits to other network schools. Ultimately, the Colloquium provided the opportunity to begin planning the co-creation of new QUEST activities and products.

Collaboration

One of the most central goals QUEST staff set for themselves and the Scholars was to collaborate in the creation of QUEST network activities and products, and in research and assessment activities. In addition, QUEST staff hoped that the Scholars would commit to a year of such collaborative work.

When asked in what ways being asked to take a role in researching continuous school improvement and the QUEST project had altered their view of both, Scholars reiterated several themes: enhanced commitment to QUEST, increased "ownership" of the project, and a "view within," as one Scholar phrased it. "It requires further involvement . . . . it offers more ownership and increased networking and collaboration with my group," wrote one participant. Another said, "My involvement here keeps me committed to continuous improvement," while yet another wrote, "Taking this role confirms my feeling of the importance of our school's continued involvement in QUEST." Collaborating in research "strengthens my stake in the project," one Scholar submitted. "It makes me even more excited about QUEST," wrote another. And one respondent wrote that "it gives me a better understanding."

QUEST Scholars also were asked to what extent they felt their input was acknowledged and used during Colloquium activities. One Scholar felt that her input had been "somewhat" acknowledged, adding that there were times she felt "uncomfortable." She did not elaborate on this experience, however. The remaining nine respondents felt that their input had been honored and

incorporated. Some comments included: "I felt valued and appreciated," "I felt my contributions were accepted warmly and with high energy," and "Everyone truly listened!"

In response to the prompt, "I felt that we were really collaborating when . . . . ," three respondents felt that every activity engendered a sense of collaboration. Three replied that they had felt most collaborative when "sharing" stories and beliefs about education. Four Scholars noted specific activities that enhanced collaboration: two mentioned dialogue, and two mentioned Interview Design.

On the daily feedback forms, participants were asked what might help them feel more fully collaborative with QUEST. After the first day of Colloquium activities, four Scholars said that they felt adequately collaborative. One participant did not respond to this question. Two noted that they would feel more collaborative if they used their E-mail capabilities. The remaining four participants had varied suggestions: "Continue the open communications," "[More] time!," "Getting my school team more involved," and "More time to reflect."

At the end of the second day of Colloquium activities, six Scholars reported that nothing was needed to enhance their sense of collaboration. Two did not respond to the question. Three Scholars simply said that staff should continue doing what they had been. A final respondent placed the responsibility for feeling more collaborative on herself, writing, "I need to work QUEST into my schedule. QUEST does a great job of collaborating."

In terms of committing to a year of collaboration, QUEST Scholars at the least professed to being so committed. As part of the application process, potential Scholars were asked to sign a statement of intent concerning their year-long commitment. And when one of the facilitators asked the Scholars if they would be willing to pilot a new QUEST self-assessment instrument in their schools, they appeared to agree to such an undertaking. In addition, most of the Scholars indicated their interest in authoring articles, giving presentations, or being involved in co-ventures to other QUEST schools.

QUEST staff also hoped that the Scholars would collaborate in the development of products. During the Colloquium, the Scholars participated in several discussions with QUEST staff and an AEL writer in order to plan future products. Although ultimately they did not decide on the development of a particular product, staff and Scholars did generate a list of potential projects on which they might collaborate.

Many of the Colloquium activities were structured around the possibility of collaborating on the development of school portfolios. The Scholars were later asked in what ways the focus on portfolios had been useful. At least two respondents appeared to have already been familiar with school portfolios, one noting that she planned to "review my school portfolio that was recently written." Two participants reported that they now intended to develop portfolios. The remainder said more generally that the discussions had been helpful. One noted that the activities "provided some foundation, need to do more work."

Both the Scholars and QUEST staff believed the collaboration they envisioned was unusual. During introductory comments on the first morning of the Colloquium, one of the facilitators pointed out that such collaboration was "a new experience for us." And during an early group activity, several Scholars made similar points: "We don't usually get to work with researchers," "This gives us a chance to look at other data," and "For us as practitioners to be able to validate what works is helpful." During an interview, one Scholar described the Colloquium as "a feast." She noted that the event helped her see some of "the things behind the scenes," and that she had learned much about "politics and boundaries" in school systems because she had been "sitting with administrators" throughout the Colloquium.

However, collaboration across role groups did not always proceed smoothly. During the last day of the Colloquium, Scholars were asked to collaborate with each other in the revision of creeds QUEST participants had developed at an earlier rally. In one of the groups, a parent objected to the use of the phrase "instructional delivery," adding that she would prefer a term that had more "student-centered" connotations. Two of the educators participating in this group quickly dismissed her concern with the argument that the phrase was "widely understood within education," an example of educational jargon. The group did not fully explore the parent's point, nor did they pause to consider the implications such wording may have for an endeavor that aims to be collaborative. Instead, the two educators may have reinforced, at least in the parent's mind, the notion that education belongs to educators, that educators are the experts in this arena to the exclusion of others.

Connection

QUEST staff also hoped that the Scholars would connect with each other and with staff in order, ultimately, to form a "community of learners and action researchers." Of the ten Scholars who completed the final evaluation form, seven noted that one of the "high points" of the Colloquium had been interacting with staff or other Scholars. Nine participants reported that one of the events they most enjoyed on the first day of the Colloquium was the introductory activity meant to foster connection between the Scholars. In terms of connections over time, several Scholars learned of programs or initiatives with which other Scholars were involved, and asked to stay in communication regarding such interests. The evaluator is aware of at least three such attempts to network.

In addition, QUEST staff communicated their goal that the Scholars would "connect with the QUEST framework to a level of deep understanding." Although none of the evaluation forms requested information concerning participants' understanding of the framework, a few Scholars mentioned having become more familiar with its components. One participant reported that the "high point" of the Colloquium had been "developing an understanding of a SMART learner." Similarly, during an activity in which the Scholars were asked to evaluate their experiences with QUEST as a whole, five participants reported that they had found the SMART learner component of the framework to be among the most useful content presented during QUEST activities. Two

mentioned that they also found material on core values to be useful. And one respondent found the entire framework to be both the most useful information presented and the most flexible: "The framework has allowed me to think about the complex issue of school improvement in a coherent way. Also, I can talk about/present pieces of the framework to colleagues in a less threatening atmosphere than the whole picture might inspire!"

Suggestions for Improvement

On the final evaluation form, participants were asked what the "low point" of the Colloquium had been. Four Scholars reported that they felt there had been too little time for all the activities. Two noted that the early afternoon activities had been difficult because, as one respondent put it, the afternoon was "my down time." Another seemed to report that the amount of content covered had been nearly overwhelming: "I became almost brain dead this afternoon—just too much for me to handle today!" One participant reported that the Protocol Process had been a "low point" because, "I didn't understand the process of what we were doing until the end!" Likewise, one participant reported at the end of the first day that "the lecture on your presentation on TASSA was rushed and hindered my evaluating." Another participant reported, "I didn't understand how the video [on leadership and the new science] worked into the discussion."

Participants were asked at the end of each day what they might change about the Colloquium. After the first day, nine reported that they would change nothing. One wrote that she would prefer "more activities, less discussion," while another joked, "I would have more break time and candies on the table!!!" Again, at the end of the second day, nine Scholars said that they would change nothing about the Colloquium. One participant noted that she would like "a list of references/books used during the meetings." The joker asked for more candy again.

The Scholars were asked to complete the prompt "Two things I wanted to change about the Colloquium were . . . . " on the final evaluation form. Three reported that they wanted to change nothing. Three said that they would have added more time to the agenda for, as one participant phrased it, "discussion of points and development of take-home items." Two comments concerned participation. One Scholar said that she wished more of her team could have attended, noting that "I think it would have helped 'gel' our team more. The other reported wanting more student and parent involvement. Another participant thought that too much content had been addressed, writing "The pace seems very fast to me—I would prefer to do less more deeply—or at least vary the pace a little more."

SCHOLARLY WORK: QUEST SCHOLARS ASSESS THE PROJECT

Part of the work the Scholars were requested to undertake was evaluation of QUEST as a whole, relying on their experiences as participants in rallies and site visits. In other words, they were asked to take a reflexive role vis-a-vis their participation, both engaging in Colloquium activities and assessing those and other QUEST events. Staff developed several activities to aid the Scholars in this task.

General Evaluation

During one evaluative activity, Scholars were asked to create a vision for QUEST, representing their conceptions of the project at its best (see p. 18). An analysis of these vision statements suggests that QUEST Scholars found several themes to be most central to their conceptions of the project's success. The three visions share four themes in common: QUEST as a network; QUEST as a nurturing and supportive; QUEST as diverse and inclusive; and QUEST as a disseminator of research and resources. Two of the visions express a sense of QUEST as a process. For instance, one vision indicates that QUEST is characterized by "becoming." Similarly, two visions described QUEST as a way of examining "possibilities," exploring the various ways schools might be improved. Two of the visions also note that QUEST instills excitement and inspiration.

In another activity, the Scholars responded to five questions concerning their evaluation of the QUEST project in general. Nine Scholars responded. The first question asked respondents what the strengths and weaknesses were of QUEST's reliance on rallies. Six Scholars replied that the rallies offered opportunities for networking and collaborating. Other strengths included the continuity of the rallies over time, the support such events offered, and the opportunity rallies provided for focusing on school improvement. Weaknesses included the amount of time participants needed to be away from their schools while participating in the rallies and the cost of attending the events. One Scholar seemed to report that she had had difficulty receiving support or funding from her local school or district for participation in QUEST, adding that this was "perhaps because of not understanding the vision of QUEST." Another responded that the ambiguity of the project was a weakness: "Sometimes I feel that I don't know where we are going, and this bothers me." A final, but ironically positive, weakness mentioned was that the rallies offered such "rich" information and interactions that "it's difficult to capture and share meaningfully and accurately what transpired."

The Scholars were asked additionally to offer suggestions for improving QUEST. Three replied that participants could benefit from spending more time with their school teams during rallies for planning action afterwards. Relatedly, two Scholars thought that school teams also should be required to write a plan for action before the end of the rallies. Other suggestions included offering a rally in each of AEL's states, offering more rallies, and videotaping or otherwise making available rally proceedings.

When asked how QUEST might involve parents, students, and community members more meaningfully, the Scholars had several suggestions. These included increasing communication with such groups; offering activities more clearly tailored to their perspectives; involving these groups in site visits; and instituting a book club, newsletter, or E-mail dialogue geared towards their concerns. One Scholar suggested that QUEST staff "prepare videos which illustrate the constructs with real examples of what parents, students, and community members do in other QUEST schools." Another suggestion implied that such groups be recruited more intensively.

QUEST staff also were interested in the activities and processes that Scholars had found most meaningful during QUEST events. Respondents reported quite a few: reflection, dialogue, Interview Design, Protocol Process, discussion, self-assessment, and kinesthetic (energizing) activities.

In order to help staff plan and develop QUEST further, the Scholars were asked which circumstances or issues made continuous school improvement most difficult. Then they were asked in what ways QUEST might help participating schools alleviate, or lessen the impact of, such issues or circumstances. The Scholars replied with a variety of issues that most impeded their efforts to improve: lack of parent involvement, the amount of energy and time required, weak leadership, resistance to change, and ignorance and apathy. One Scholar wrote that "cognitive dissidence [sic] makes things very difficult. We talk about and learn so many important things during our QUEST time, but the reality of what takes place back at school often precludes how much gets done." In order to help QUEST participants overcome such hurdles, two Scholars suggested that QUEST staff continue to provide support. Another two suggested that QUEST staff mandate school teams to write and enact action plans. Other suggestions included developing "modules which are/later become chapters in a book" concerning school improvement and publishing stories of successful improvement efforts "that would tell the chaos that occurred while developing their program."

"Stepping Back": QUEST as an Analytic Haven

During the Colloquium, participants expressed their thoughts and perspectives on QUEST, while engaged in activities, while in conversation, and during breaks and lunches. As in the visions they developed, the Scholars expressed several themes they thought significant to their experience of QUEST. The first of these was their sense of QUEST as an analytic haven. One Scholar described the project as "an opportunity to step back." Later, another said that QUEST was "a place to ask questions," offering the opportunity to "step out of our roles." During a group discussion, one Scholar offered that "it's very important to step back and 'objectivize'. . . . to ask is this [classroom practice] valuable or not." QUEST was also seen as an "intellectual challenge," facilitated by time and distance from participants' "busy school environment." To these Scholars, then, QUEST provided the means to assess their work, away from the bustle of their schools. Participants often described this experience as "rejuvenating," "refreshing," or "renewing."

One of the ways, then, that QUEST appears to support school improvement is by offering participants a retreat-like atmosphere. Integral to this climate are structured opportunities to analyze school issues and share stories of struggle and success. The climate also seems to feel intellectually safe to participants. The combination of meeting at a location other than a school for several days and participating in activities that encourage reflection and assessment appears to give network members a sense of remove from their daily struggles: an analytic haven.

"Seeing through Others' Eyes": QUEST as Diverse

Another important aspect of QUEST seems to be the diversity of roles, perspectives, and levels of experience represented by various participants. Not only did the Scholars appear to value the inclusiveness of QUEST, they also thought that such diversity enabled them to analyze issues from a variety of perspectives. For instance, during one discussion, an administrator suggested that QUEST staff and Scholars "need to sell the value of networking of local schools." Then, the administrator of a small rural school described the difficulty of such an endeavor, noting her perspective that rural schools tended to be more competitive with one another. This exchange provided Scholars the opportunity to think about how facilitating networking might differ across rural and urban or suburban districts. Similarly, one Scholar observed that high school teachers seemed generally less collaborative than elementary teachers. The Scholars then had a brief exchange about why this might be. Again, the diversity of participants facilitated comparisons of multiple viewpoints. In terms of QUEST itself, one Scholar said, "We all bring experience to QUEST. We're open to learning. That helps us attain new ideas." Another described the project as allowing people of diverse standpoints and experience to "be on the same playing field." Thus, "see[ing] through others' eyes" seemed to be an important part of the QUEST experience.

Not only did the Scholars think that diversity was central to their QUEST experiences, they valued diversity. For example, one participant said during a discussion that collaboration was facilitated by "hold[ing] the idea that there are other ways of thinking and doing." Her statement suggests a belief that diversity enhances productive work. One of QUEST's strengths, reported a Scholar, was that it offered a "different perspective." Again, diversity is framed as a valuable attribute, providing network members analytical remove from their ongoing work.

"A Personal Journey": QUEST as a Process

One theme Scholars reiterated was their sense that QUEST was not a structured program for achieving a specific outcome. Rather, they thought of QUEST as process, a way of "becoming" and examining "possibilities" for school improvement. One Scholar offered that "QUEST is a way to take charge of change." Another found it to be a fairly nonprescriptive process. As one Scholar put it, "QUEST leads teachers [students, parents, and administrators] to answers—it doesn't package answers." Relatedly, Scholars appear to believe that school improvement itself is a process. In response to the question, "What is QUEST?," one participant replied that it was a project focused

on "continuous school improvement, with emphasis on *continuous*." This statement indicates that QUEST clearly conveyed to participants that school improvement must be ongoing. During a discussion about how core values influence school improvement efforts, one participant communicated her belief that, for instance, "arriving at beliefs is a personal journey." Likewise, Scholars discussed the chaos that followed improvement initiatives, as well as the eventual equilibrium that emerged after periods of experience with such initiatives. One participant noted later that QUEST supported school improvement well because, "this is ongoing . . . . there are expectations to continue." Thus, the Scholars seemed to believe that school improvement was a process, and that QUEST was therefore also appropriately a process.

"Speaking in Cursive": QUEST as a Forum for Sharing

The Scholars often referred to their appreciation of the "sharing" that took place during QUEST events. For instance, when asked on the final evaluation form what the high point of the Colloquium had been, six of the ten respondents (one Scholar left the Colloquium early) replied in various ways that they most valued the interactions with other Scholars. For one participant, the high points had been "networking, sharing ideas, collaborating, evaluating myself and my school." For another, the high point was "the continuous discussion/dialogue."

During the Colloquium, the Scholars frequently shared stories about their experiences, sometimes quite spontaneously. (Interestingly, they occasionally asked staff for permission to tell their stories.) One memorable, and allegorical, story was about a kindergarten student who commented that she had learned much from a lecture given by a writer, adding, however, that several times the writer had been "speaking in cursive" and had therefore been unintelligible to her. Other stories shared related to experiences the Scholars had found instructive. One Scholar, for instance, talked about how she had "learned to play the game" of meeting district requirements in order to facilitate support for the less conventional projects she hoped to institute. Another story concerned using data for multiple purposes, told as narrative about one participant's personal discovery of such uses. Participants appeared to enjoy both telling and listening to stories, and QUEST staff, having held rallies at which storytelling was a central theme, seemed to encourage such narratives.

"Someone to Call On": QUEST as a Network

The Scholars also agreed that QUEST ought to continue operating as a network. By doing this, one participant said, the project was "building a sense of colleagues outside our immediate environment." This network provided support in the form of "someone to call on; it's E-mail, someone in cyberspace; it is someone to call and keep me close to the vision." One Scholar reported that the network's "closeness" helped her continue the school improvement work that sometimes was difficult to undertake given the contingencies of her other duties. During a discussion of product development, one of the QUEST staff asked the Scholars if QUEST could be scaled-up "without

coming together with other schools." One replied flatly, with most other Scholars nodding in agreement, "No. You need to meet."

In addition, the Scholars indicated that the QUEST staff offered much of the support of which they availed themselves, referring several times to helpful phone conversations they had with the facilitators. They also praised the co-ventures, or site visits, in which QUEST staff visited schools, collected data, planned or conducted a technical assistance activity, and later returned feedback to the school. This feedback, one participant submitted, was useful because QUEST staff's "mission is *only* school improvement, not accreditation or testing . . . . there are no hidden agendas." Part of the value of this network support activity for this Scholar was that it provided some assessment that was unconnected to any potentially punitive or political relationship.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

Several conclusions can be drawn based upon the data collected.

The Scholars Colloquium participants generally felt that they had embarked on a genuinely collaborative endeavor with QUEST staff. Quite a few noted that such an opportunity was unique in their experience, and credited project staff with creating an atmosphere at once intellectually rigorous and safe in which collaboration could take place. However, not all attempts at collaboration were successful. One participant reported that the experience had made her "uncomfortable," and during one activity, in which participants revised creed statements, several educators appeared to dismiss a parent's concern regarding the connotations of education jargon.

The Scholars appeared to make meaningful connections with each other and with QUEST staff during the Colloquium. They shared stories that revealed their mistakes and triumphs, they teased each other, and they made plans to stay in contact with one another.

Some participants noted that they had connected with the various components of the QUEST framework for continuous improvement, particularly the SMART learner component. Several Scholars also mentioned that the framework as a whole continued to be a useful way of conceptualizing ongoing school improvement.

In terms of evaluating QUEST as a whole, Scholars offered a variety of critiques and observations. Critiques included that rallies required effort and time away from school (although participants also felt that being away from their schools enabled them to analyze their work more deeply), that the project was not clearly delineated, and that school teams needed to spend more time together planning during events.

The Scholars also had various discussions about their conceptions of what constitutes QUEST. Their conversations suggested several themes: QUEST is an analytic retreat; QUEST offers opportunities to inquire into school improvement from diverse participant perspectives; QUEST is a process of inquiring into improvement; QUEST is a vehicle for connecting with colleagues; and QUEST is a supportive network.

Recommendations

The data from participant observation, unstructured interviews, and evaluation questionnaires suggest several recommendations.

QUEST staff may want to be attuned to dynamics between educators and other school community members who are not education professionals. Although educators continue to comprise the largest group of QUEST participants, the project aims to involve all constituents of school communities who are concerned with continuous school improvement. It may be deleterious to parent and student involvement in the project if such groups feel that their input is devalued by educators. Thus, QUEST staff might develop activities and protocols aimed at including non-educators more fully.

The Scholars offered suggestions for improving QUEST to which staff may want to attend. For instance, rallies could allow school teams to spend more time together planning for improvement projects. Participants also suggested that the pace of QUEST events was too fast, not always providing enough time for serious investigation of topics.

One Scholar reported not understanding the directions for one of the more complicated Colloquium activities. QUEST staff may want to ask participants if they are clear about the purpose and procedures of activities in order to address any misunderstandings.

Finally, QUEST staff could consider capitalizing on those themes Scholars suggested were important to the success of the project. Hence, they might continue to design rallies that have a retreat-like atmosphere, encourage the use of storytelling, and enhance the diversity of those participating. In addition, project staff might consider building the network further and encouraging some participants to become network leaders who could help sustain it beyond the REL contract.

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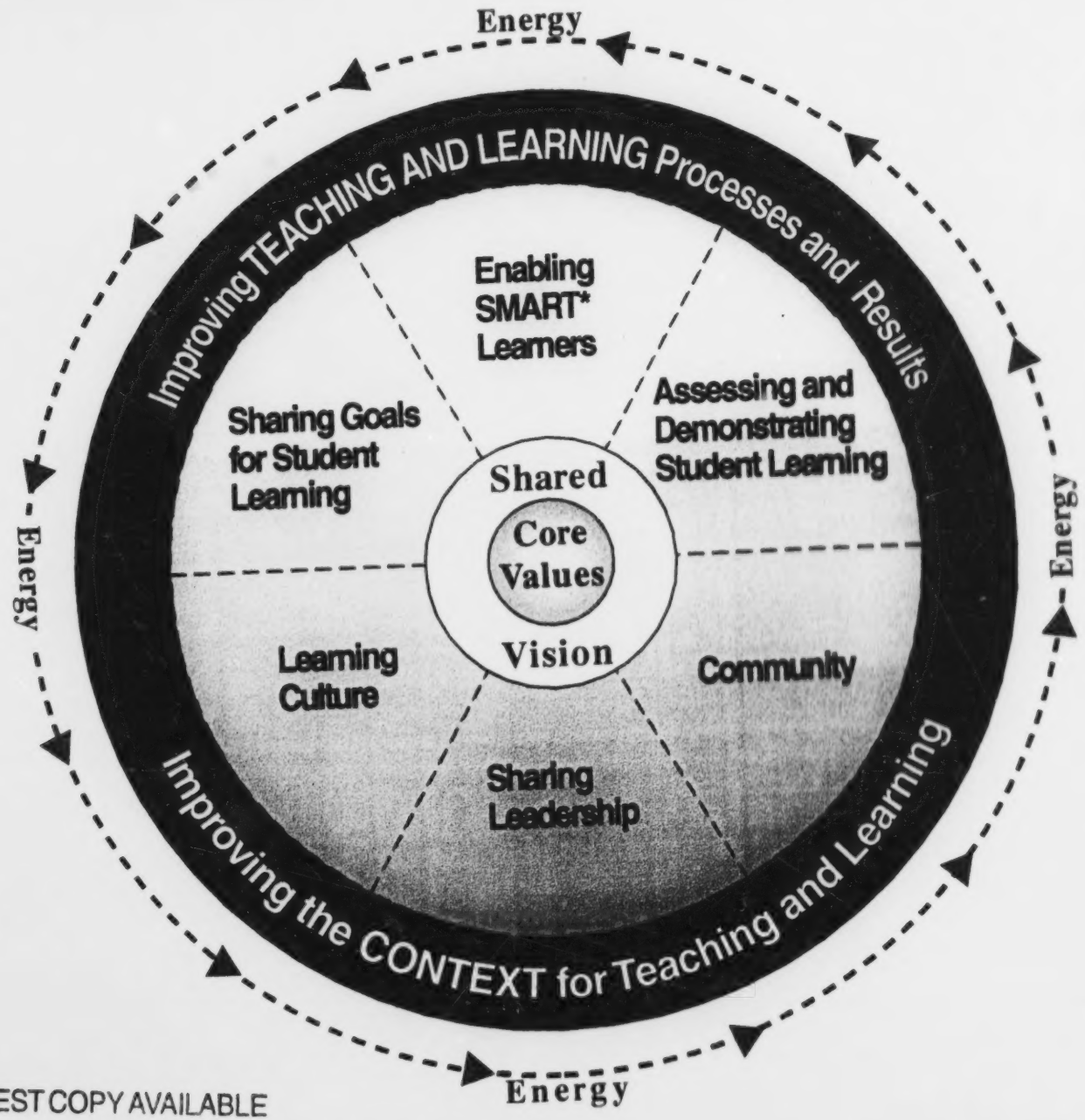
APPENDICES

APPENDIX A:

QUEST Framework for Continuous Improvement



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APPENDIX B:

Daily Feedback Form

QUEST Scholars Program
Daily Feedback Form
July 16, 1998

Please help us assess today's activities by answering the following questions.

1. What activities or events did you most enjoy today?

2. What activities or events did not "work" for you today?

3. What was the most useful activity for you today?

4. What would help you feel more fully collaborative with QUEST?

5. If you could change anything about Colloquium activities tomorrow, what might you change?

Thank you!

APPENDIX C:

Final Evaluation Form

QUEST Scholars Program
July 16-18, 1998

Your answers to the following questions will help us evaluate this Colloquium. Your replies will remain anonymous, so please answer as honestly and candidly as you can. Thanks!

1. **Please check one.** My participation in my QUEST team is primarily as a:

____ Student	____ District Administrator
____ Teacher	____ Community Member
____ Parent	____ Other School Staff
____ School Administrator	

Please finish the following prompts.

2. The high point of the Colloquium for me was...

3. The low point of the Colloquium for me was...

4. I felt that we were really collaborating when...

5. Two things I wanted to change about the Colloquium were...

Please answer the following questions.

6. You are being asked to take a role in researching continuous school improvement and the QUEST project. Does taking this role alter the way you view QUEST? Continuous improvement? In what ways does/doesn't it?

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-over-

7. To what extent do you feel that your input was acknowledged and used during Colloquium activities?

8. In what ways, if at all, were the discussions about portfolios useful to you?

9. How well do you think each of the Colloquium goals were met?

10. What, if anything, did you learn during the Colloquium that you plan to apply to your own school improvement efforts?

Thank you!

APPENDIX D:

Completed Evaluation *Standards* Checklist

Citation Form

The Program Evaluation Standards (1994, Sage) guided the development of this (check one):

____ request for evaluation plan/design/proposal
____ evaluation plan/design/proposal
____ evaluation contract
X evaluation report
____ other: _____

To interpret the information provided on this form, the reader needs to refer to the full text of the standards as they appear in Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation, *The Program Evaluation Standards* (1994), Thousand Oaks, CA, Sage.

The *Standards* were consulted and used as indicated in the table below (check as appropriate):

Descriptor		The Standard was deemed applicable and to the extent feasible was taken into account.	The Standard was deemed applicable but could not be taken into account.	The Standard was not deemed applicable.	Exception was taken to the Standard.
U1	Stakeholder Identification	X			
U2	Evaluator Credibility	X			
U3	Information Scope and Selection	X			
U4	Values Identification	X			
U5	Report Clarity	X			
U6	Report Timeliness and Dissemination	X			
U7	Evaluation Impact	X			
F1	Practical Procedures	X			
F2	Political Viability			X	
F3	Cost Effectiveness	X			
P1	Service Orientation	X			
P2	Formal Agreements	X			
P3	Rights of Human Subjects	X			
P4	Human Interactions	X			
P5	Complete and Fair Assessment	X			
P6	Disclosure of Findings	X			
P7	Conflict of Interest	X			
P8	Fiscal Responsibility	X			
A1	Program Documentation	X			
A2	Context Analysis	X			
A3	Described Purposes and Procedures	X			
A4	Defensible Information Sources	X			
A5	Valid Information	X			
A6	Reliable Information	X			
A7	Systematic Information	X			
A8	Analysis of Quantitative Information			X	
A9	Analysis of Qualitative Information	X			
A10	Justified Conclusions	X			
A11	Impartial Reporting	X			
A12	Metaevaluation	X			

Name (typed) Caitlin Howley-Rowe Date: 8/21/98

(signature) Caitlin Howley-Rowe

Position or Title: Research Assistant

Agency: Appalachia Educational Laboratory, Inc.

Address: P.O. Box 1348, Charleston, WV 25325-1348

Relation to Document: Author
(e.g., author of document, evaluation team leader, external auditor, internal auditor)

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